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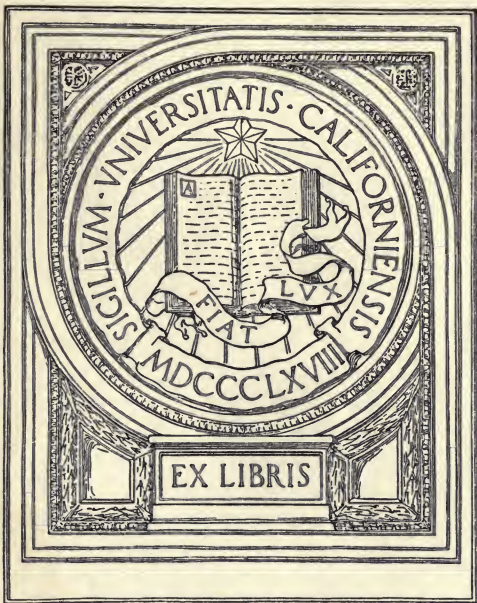
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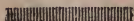
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Her Priceless Love;

OR,

BONNY BELLE.

BY

GERALDINE FLEMING

Author of "The Battle of Hearts," "Sold for Gold,"
"Her Dearest Love."



STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

PUBLISHERS

79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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By NORMAN L. MUNRO

Her Priceless Love

(Printed in the United States of America)

HER PRICELESS LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE IN THE STREETS.

The weary salesgirls were hurrying out of the rapidly darkening store of Hardman & Son.

It was after ten o'clock at night, and all the other stores on Sixth Avenue had already closed.

Hardman & Son were always last to release their tired workers, as if determined to get just a little more than they paid for in labor.

And, as usual, they had been the first to begin the late hours of the Christmas season, so that this night the avenue was almost deserted, except for the throngs that poured from the great store.

This way and that the girls hurried, some going east, some west, some north, and others south.

As much as possible, they went in pairs; for when they left the well-lighted avenue to enter the gloomier side streets, at that hour of the night, a girl naturally felt timid when alone.

You could see those who were not fortunate enough to have companions wrap their outer garments more closely about them, and pull thick veils over their faces, while they half ran through the streets.

Many of the girls were too young and pretty to have been out alone at that hour of the night; but what help was there for it? Fathers, mothers, and brothers were all hard at work, too, and the girls must take care of themselves.

Among the last to leave the store was one who did well, indeed, in closely veiling her face; for it was one to tempt an anchorite to a second glance, so witching was it in its seductive beauty.

But for all the roguish glances of the dancing brown eyes, and the merry play of dimples about the rosebud lips, there was nothing coquettish in beautiful Viola Redmond.

She knew as well as anybody the dangers of being in the streets of the great metropolis at night; but there was no sign of apprehension in the radiant face as she drew the thick veil over it. There was no tremor in the softly undulating bosom, as she buttoned her coat closely about her perfect form.

She looked up and down the avenue as she stepped over the threshold to the pavement. There was no one to keep her company, so quickly had the tired girls hurried homeward.

But Viola only laughed softly, with a certain subdued happiness, and started uptown.

"Wait a moment, little Viola; I am going your way," said a man's voice in a low, wheedling tone.

Viola recognized the voice, and shuddered at its sound.

Her immediate impulse was to accelerate her pace into a run. Anything to get away from Peter Harriem, the confidential clerk of Hardman & Son.

But it was in the man's power to have her discharged from her position. She restrained her impulse, and turned quickly to say in a low tone:

"You are very kind, but—I do not go the same way as you, sir. Thank you, just the same."

He stepped to her side, and kept pace with her, emitting a low, chuckling laugh as he did so, and saying in a peculiarly oily tone:

"Well, it won't be any hardship to go out of my way a little to walk with pretty Viola Redmond."

He touched her plump arm as he spoke, as if he intended to walk with his hand on her elbow.

She shuddered, and drew away.

She could see the long, bony hand, which always made her think that it was about to get a stealthy clutch on something. She could not bear to have him touch her.

"Such a little beauty as you should not be alone in the wicked streets so late," he said, sidling up to her again, and once more taking her elbow in his hand.

There was something so sleek in his manner, that

Viola had the feeling she would have had if a snake had begun to coil about her.

"I can walk alone, please," she said, quickening her pace.

"What a coy little thing it is!" he murmured.

It seemed to her that there was a threatening note in his voice.

She thought of his power, and of the sick mother at home.

"I—I only meant that—that I am used to walking alone, and that—that I can walk faster if—if no one assists me," she stammered.

"Yes," said her companion, in a musing tone, and as if continuing a thought that had been in his mind, "it is not nice for such beauties to be out at night. But, after all, Viola, it is a great deal to have work to do these hard times, isn't it?"

"Ye-es, sir," she stammered, in a low tone. "I am sure I am grateful. I—I do not mind being out. It is not very far for me, and—and I can hurry."

He was close to her again, and although he did not again attempt to touch the rounded elbow, he touched her shoulder with his. She bore the contact shudderingly.

"Mr. Hardman," he went on cunningly, "was asking me to-day if there was no way in which he could get rid

of some of the girls. He seemed to think we could do with less help."

"Everybody seems to work hard," she ventured to say.

"Yes; I know it," he said, in a sly, stealthy way, that made her flesh creep. "But I shall have to send a few girls away just to please him. But I will look out for you, little Viola. You shan't be one of the unlucky ones."

She felt his hand crawl, so to speak, along her arm and rest again on her elbow. She knew that he was making that liberty the price of her being kept in the store.

Her heart throbbed violently, and the blood leaped to her face. Oh, how indignant she was! Fiery words were on her tongue, and she felt an angry desire to fling his hand from her.

Then there rose before her eyes the picture of the pain-furrowed face of her sick mother, and she smothered her anger, and let him walk thus by her side.

But she felt as the man does who wakes in the woods after a sweet, refreshing sleep, to find a deadly snake passing over his body. To protest is to court instant death.

She permitted Peter Herriem to walk by her side, though her whole nature was convulsed with fear and loathing.

"I have sometimes thought I would have your wages raised," he murmured. She felt as if the snake were hissing in her ear. "Would you like that?"

"If—if I could earn it," she answered faintly.

He chuckled.

"Don't you think you earn it now?" he asked, bending over her arm a little.

She could not tell why he frightened her so, but she could not answer, so great was the effort to keep from throwing his hand off, and running away with all her speed.

"But it doesn't matter whether you earn it or not," he went on, his voice growing lower and more oily with each word, while his hot breath was perceptible on her cheek, even through her thick veil. "If I wish to raise your wages, I can do so. Shall I do it, my pretty one?"

Her breath came swiftly as she listened, and the increasing pressure on her plump arm drove her into a frantic fear.

She could not answer. She did not know what she was doing.

She was aware only of the feeling that somehow she must get him away from her.

She stammered an incoherent something about speaking to her mother about it, and broke away, running rapidly down a side street.

She ran swiftly and with a palpitating fear of some-

thing horrid and dreadful which she could not understand.

She felt as if she had been contaminated by the touch as of some slimy thing.

She ran until she feared to attract observation, then stopped with beating heart and listened; she could hear no pursuing footsteps.

She looked back, and could see no one answering to the tall, stooping figure and shuffling walk of the confidential man of Hardman & Son.

That fact made her breathe more freely, but the fear of what she had experienced, and of what might be the result on the morrow, made her go swiftly but tremblingly on.

But presently she paused and looked about with a start. She examined the houses in the block as if looking for some landmark.

"I was so frightened I almost forgot," she murmured, and if her face could have been seen it would have revealed a blush of sweet consciousness.

She walked more leisurely now, and as she neared the corner of Seventh Avenue she looked eagerly yet furtively around.

Then under cover of the darkness her cheeks took on a rosier hue still, a little panting murmur of joy came from between her parted lips, and her brown eyes were cast demurely down.

One would have thought she could not see anything that took place. But it would have been a mistake, for she did see a man's figure start from the shadow of a house and approach her with quick, eager strides.

"Is it you, Viola?" fell on her ear the next moment, and the rich, baritone voice vibrated in her heart till it was tremulous with a sweet delight.

"Is it you, Mr. Walter?" she answered timidly.

"Yes, I have been waiting for you. I cannot bear to have you walk home alone so late. I may go with you, mayn't I?"

"I am afraid it will be a trouble to you," she murmured faintly.

"A trouble!" he repeated in a low, reproachful tone. "Oh, you know better than that. I waited for you because there is nothing else I care so much for as a walk with you."

CHAPTER II.

LAW FOR TWO HEARTS.

They walked along silently for a while, perhaps because they were too happy to talk, perhaps because what they might have to say could be said more impressively in some more secluded street than Seventh Avenue.

People turned and looked at them as they passed. Nor was it strange that they should, for the two made a pretty picture.

He had the lithe, sinewy frame and the broad shoulders of an athlete, and the face of an Apollo. Besides, he was dressed in the height of the fashion, and was plainly a swell.

Her veil covered her face so that none could see its exquisite beauty, but shabby as her gown and coat were, they were trim and jaunty, and revealed a form so rounded and graceful that it was easy to suspect a beautiful face behind the veil.

They walked together as if they had forgotten all the rest of the world. His hand, unrebuked, held hers in a firm, warm grasp, and they walked in step, her plump shoulder snuggled unconsciously against his stalwart arm.

At the first corner he led her into the quieter side

street, and she did not resist, though for some reason her breath came a little quicker.

"I hate that noisy avenue," he said, in a low tone.

"It is better than the quieter streets when one is alone," she answered, in a tone as low as his own.

"You ought not be alone in the streets at night," he said earnestly.

"It is only during the Christmas shopping season that I am out so late," she replied. "Besides, I keep on the lighted avenue, and no one is likely to trouble me."

"But it is better for you to have some one with you," he said. "Are you glad to have me with you?"

There was silence for a moment, then she answered in a voice that was a little unsteady:

"I—I am always pleased to see you, Mr. Walter. You have been so kind to me ever since you saved me from those drunken men. But—but——"

"Well?" he asked softly, as she hesitated.

"I—I am afraid it is not right to meet you in this way. You—you know that your father would be angry if he knew."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"Father might at first," he said. "But he is always willing to let me have my own way."

Viola sighed, then turned with a gesture of decision, and said quickly, as if she feared to give herself time for hesitation:

"I have enjoyed knowing you so much, Mr. Walter, and I will confess that I have looked forward to meeting you. But I know it cannot be best, for I have not dared to tell mamma about it. I know she would say that I must not do it."

"You mean," he exclaimed reproachfully, "that I must not wait for you to take you home these nights that you are out so late?"

"I—I think it is the only way," she faltered. "Besides——"

"Besides what?" he demanded, a little bitterly.

"Besides, I cannot—dare not—do anything that will be likely to cost me my position in the store. If your father should have the faintest idea of our meeting he would discharge me. And if I were to lose my place now, what would become of my mother? I must think of her, you know."

"If I were only in the store it would not be so," he said moodily. "I have asked him to let me be a member of the firm in reality as well as in name. But he won't. It is Hardman & Son, but he won't even let me learn the business. If he should die, no one would know anything about it but that sneak, Peter Harriem."

Viola shuddered involuntarily at the name, and Walter noticed it at once, and cried out with keen intuition:

"Has that snake been saying anything to you, Viola?"

Viola feared to tell the young man what had occurred.

"He—he wished to—to walk home with me to-night," she answered, in a low tone, "but I told him I would rather go alone."

"Confound his impudence!" said Walter Hardman angrily. "How dare he?"

Viola did not speak, nor did Walter for some time, but walked by her side in moody silence. Suddenly he broke out:

"Viola, I shan't give up taking you home these nights. You ought not ask it."

She trembled at his vehemence, but did not yield.

"I must ask it," she said.

"Only because you are afraid of losing your place?" he asked.

"Not only that," she answered; and then went on reproachfully: "Oh, Mr. Walter! it is not like you to be selfish. Can't you see that it may put me in a false position?"

"No, I can't. How?" he retorted.

"You are rich, and I am poor. You are a gentleman with certain prospects in life, and I am only a salesgirl in your father's store. If we were seen together there would be talk. You ought not make me tell you this."

"Somebody has told you that I am engaged to Eunice Carroll?" he cried, in sharp, angry tones.

"No," she panted, involuntarily drawing away from him. "I did not know that. Aristocratic Eunice Carroll! I never heard that."

"But it is not true," he said eagerly, taking his place by her side again. "My father wishes me to marry her because she is mad on the subject of aristocratic birth and position. Self-made men are always that way."

"It is another reason why we should not meet again," Viola said, in a low tone.

She tried to make herself believe that she had expected something of the sort from the first; but there was a misery in her heart she could not quell.

But Walter would not accept her conclusion. He bent lower, and said softly in her ear:

"Viola, it is not a reason for not meeting again. I care nothing for her, and I will not marry her to please my father. I shall marry where my heart is or not at all."

"We must not meet again," she said, in a voice she vainly tried to keep firm. "I—I will say good-night here. There is my house. Good-night!"

"No," he said, holding her gently. "I cannot let you go now. We have said too much or too little; too little, I think. Viola, I did not mean to speak to you to-night! I—I was afraid you were not ready——"

"Mr. Walter," panted Viola, in a sort of exquisite terror, which she could not have defined, "I—I—it is late. Let me go!"

"Not until I have told you that I love you, Viola. I must say it, dear. I—I know that you are not ready to hear me say it. But I cannot let you go after what has been said without telling you that I love you.

"I do not expect you to love me, dear. I know it is sudden; I know I am unworthy of you. But you are sending me away from you, and I cannot go without a word of hope. Viola, darling, won't you try to love me? You don't speak. Is there some other? Oh, Viola!"

They were in a deserted part of the street, with no one likely to see or overhear them.

His arm had crept about her waist, but at the miserable thought that she might love another, he drew it away and caught both her hands in his.

She held her head averted, and did not answer. If he had not loved her so ardently he might have known by her silence and by her quick breathing that her answer would not be unfavorable.

"Viola," he cried passionately, "why do you not answer me? It is true we have known each other but three months. But I loved you from the first, and have loved you better and better all the time.

"All my thoughts have been of you. I have dreamed of you at night, and have lived through the days on the hope of meeting you at night when you went home from the store.

"My heart has bled for you as you toiled so hard, and I have prayed Heaven that you would love me so that I could rescue you from the want and care that oppress you by making you my wife.

"Viola, is there another whom you love better? Is there some one you have given your heart to? Is there? Won't you answer me that, dear?"

She shook her head. Her heart was too full for speech, and he could not see the happiness in her face.

"There is no one?" he cried. "Then may I hope that by and by you will learn to love me? Think, dear, of the happiness of a little home of your own, where you can give your mother all the care and attention she needs. Won't you give me one word of hope, Viola, dear?"

His arm was around her waist again, and his face was close to hers.

He was pleading with all the fervor of his soul, hardly daring to hope, and yet each moment filled with an increasing thrill of joy.

She did not draw away from him, she did not give a sign of repugnance.

And now he could feel the trembling of the hand he held.

He uttered a passionate cry of hope and happiness as it was borne in upon his heart that she was silent from acquiescence and shyness.

"Viola, my love!" he cried, pressing her to his heart. "Do I read your silence aright? May I hope?"

Her head fell on his breast, and a low sob broke from her lips.

"Oh, I love you," he heard her say; "but how can it ever be? I love you, but we must part."

It seemed almost as if he would crush her in the ecstasy of his joy.

He snatched the envious veil away from her beautiful face and rained fervent kisses on her lips.

"Part!" he cried. Do you think I will ever let you go? Never! If you love me, nothing can keep us apart. I will never give you up. Promise me, Viola, that you will never be persuaded to give me up. What higher law than love is there for two hearts? Promise me, Viola!"

"Your father?" she murmured, finding it easy to yield to his loving vehemence.

"My father will make a fuss at first," he replied confidently. "But he only lives to make me happy. I am his infatuation. He hoards his money for me to spend. He will do as I wish, never fear."

"But he is proud and anxious for a lofty marriage for you. He will be disappointed," said Viola.

Walter laughed as men laugh whose happiness has intoxicated them so that all obstacles seem shadowy.

"I will answer for my father. Let us go see your mother."

CHAPTER III.

“COME TO MY ARMS.”

Peter Harriem, meanwhile, had looked after the fleeing form of the beautiful salesgirl, a scowl of chagrin on his face.

It was humiliating to be left in that way, just as he seemed on the point of conquering.

He looked for a moment with his head thrust forward very much in the manner of a snake that has struck at some creature which has escaped just in time.

Then his shoulders drooped, and he slunk across the street to the opposite side, and followed Viola as she sped down the pavement.

He seemed fitted by nature for what is known in detective parlance as a “shadow,” for he seemed to know how to melt his attenuated form into the very railings in front of the houses.

He could not have told why he followed her.

Probably he was merely doing what was most natural to him.

Craft, and guile, and subtlety were his processes always.

When he saw Viola joined by Walter he started, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, showing that he had not **really** expected to discover anything.

In fact, he was not yet near enough to be able to distinguish who it was that had been waiting for the pretty girl he had marked for his own prey.

All that was clear to him was that the young man was well dressed, and bore himself like a gentleman.

"So that's it, eh?" he muttered to himself.

"She has a swell for a lover, already. That is why she spurns my advances. I thought it was odd. And yet she looks so innocent! You never can tell with girls. They can give us men points in deception."

It never occurred to his base mind to doubt that Viola had fallen a victim to the greater attractions of some young roué.

"Well," he muttered, as he sneaked after the lovers, "she is too pretty to give up right away. My turn may come yet. I will see his face, and that may help me to an idea. I am not handsome; but I have more wit and cunning than better-looking men."

He chuckled as he spoke; for his own words recalled to him the numerous times that he had set out to accomplish something, and had succeeded.

While the lovers stood in the shadow and opened their hearts to each other, he stood on the opposite side of the street, under a stoop, watching them with all his eyes.

He saw all that happened, but heard **nothing**, though

he racked his brains to think of some way of catching only a few words.

There was no doubt in his mind, however, that Viola loved the young aristocrat, and he was surprised to discover how angry the thought made him.

"Curse the girl!" he muttered. "Why did she want to fall in love with him? It would have been better for her to look on me with favor. I can do more for her, and would not tire of her as soon. But I will find some way of getting between them. Some brainless dude, no doubt."

He cared more for Viola than he had supposed. He had watched her covertly for weeks, and had gloated over her with the thought that when the time was ripe, he would get her into his power.

And now that he had decided to take the first step toward winning her, this stranger had stepped in and taken her from him.

He ground his teeth as he watched Walter pressing her rosebud lips. He had looked at those perfect lips many a time with silent gloating, dreaming of the time when they would be free to him.

He had gazed at her rounded form with delight. And he hated the man whose arm was about her waist now.

"I would have married her," he hissed to himself. "That young aristocrat will ruin her!"

In truth his motives from the first had been of the very basest. It was only now that he realized that her wonderful beauty had captured what took the place of a heart in his despicable nature.

While the two were occupied with their happiness, and were oblivious of all that passed about them, he stole from his hiding place and sneaked to the corner, where he knew they must pass.

He drew his hat low, turned his coat collar up, and crouched against the wall like a homeless tramp, waiting for them to come by.

And at last they did come by, the veil still off the sweet face, now irradiated with joy and fixed with passionate gaze to the face of Walter Hardman.

They passed, and Peter Harriem gazed after them with baleful eyes fixed on the young man.

"Walter Hardman!" he gasped. "That whelp! It is something else I owe him for. He scorns me, and looks down upon me, the white-handed aristocrat! Now he has stolen her from me. Oh, it will be a very sweet revenge! How I hate him!

"He has always had all that has been denied to me; he has had ease and luxury from his babyhood; he has been petted and spoiled; he is handsome and talented.

"I was born virtually in the gutter, I have had nothing but hard work and cold looks. I have been kicked

and cuffed from place to place. I am ugly and commonplace.

"But the money he was born to will some day be mine. And money is power. I shall make men bow to me because I hold the wealth to make them. And he will have to work with his white hands, or starve. Curse him! I hope he will starve.

"And now he comes to take my beautiful Viola. But I will tear them apart, and bring her to my feet. I will punish them both, and yet possess her. She shall be mine.

"I will work and scheme and plot until he is ruined, and she is forced to come to my arms. Then let her shudder because I touch her dainty arm! then let her start from me!"

He half crept, half slouched away, his shambling form seeming to move sideways as he progressed.

He had a room in a great, lonely building in an out-of-the-way quarter of the city, because it was cheaper to rent a small room and buy only what he wanted to eat.

He would not let any rapacious landlady get rich at his expense.

So he lived in the cheerless little room, cooked his own breakfast and supper, and bought only his dinner in a cheap restaurant, where he could tell just which were the cheapest dishes to buy.

He dressed well because Silas Hardman demanded that of everybody connected with Hardman & Son.

Now that he was in his cold room, he threw off his good clothes, donned a shabby suit, far too short in the legs and arms for him, and then lighted the fire in the little cookstove.

His supper was a simple affair, and did not take long to cook—a tiny piece of chuck steak and two slices of stale bread.

He had discovered that stale bread could be bought for two cents less a loaf than fresh bread.

After his supper he paced the room so that he might think of what he would better do in relation to Viola and Walter. Besides, if he walked he would not need much fire in the stove.

CHAPTER IV.

"I LOVE THAT SALESGIRL."

Silas Hardman, grim and keen-eyed, sat in his private office on the second floor of the great building in which the enormous business of Hardman & Son was carried on.

Excepting for Walter, he cared for no human being. The business of his life was to amass more and more wealth, until at last it should be said of him that no one was richer.

Walter was to be a gentleman, and to have all that he never had had, or even cared for. Walter should take his place in the world of fashion, and be talked of in the papers.

Walter might have his yacht and his horses. He must belong to the fashionable clubs, and be a first-nighter at the theaters. There was a box at the opera and a country seat up the Hudson.

And Walter was to marry into the most exclusive family in New York. He was to ally himself to beauty, wealth, and blood. Eunice Carroll seemed to have fulfilled Walter's fate by loving him.

Silas Hardman had discovered it by accident, and had hailed it as a dispensation of Providence. Walter

was to marry Eunice. And it never had occurred to his father that he would object.

There was something inflexible in the love of the elder for his son. It almost seemed as if he was trying to live Walter's life for him.

Walter wondered sometimes if his father was not vicariously enjoying the youth he had lost.

Peter Harriem, with his sphinxlike face and reptile manner, stood in front of Mr. Hardman, reading, in a low, yet distinctly audible tone, from some papers relating to the affairs of the firm.

Mr. Hardman listened intently, and made curt comments, which the other noted down with a subtle reverence of manner which pleased the employer. Any other sort of flattery he would have resented, but he liked that. It seemed so unintentional.

While they were still thus occupied, there came a soft tap at the door. Peter looked with humble inquiry at Mr. Hardman.

"Come in!" said Mr. Hardman curtly, and with a note of impatience in his tone.

The door opened, and with flushed face and hesitating step, Viola entered, carrying a package, which she handed silently to Peter, who stood quite still, so that she was obliged to cross the room to him.

Mr. Hardman looked at her with cold, inquiring

eyes, seeing her exquisite beauty without being affected by it.

"Lace samples from Merivale, Parker & Co.," said Peter.

"Go!" said Mr. Hardman curtly.

Viola fled with trepidation, wondering in her quaking heart how that man could be the father of her Walter.

"Why was she sent?" demanded Mr. Hardman, in his cold way. "Are there no messengers?"

"If you please, Mr. Hardman," answered Peter, in his most cringing tone, "I left word to have her sent up."

Mr. Hardman was never angry in the usual sense. It was seldom necessary. He glanced with surprised coldness at his confidential man, and said:

"Why?"

"Will you pardon me, Mr. Hardman," said Peter humbly, "if I explain in my own way? I assure you it is a matter of importance."

"Go on; you know by this time that I do not wish to waste time. What is it you wish to tell me?"

He supposed there had been a theft, in which the girl was mixed up.

"Did you notice how unusually beautiful the girl was, sir?" Peter asked, his manner apologizing for him for referring to such a matter in business hours.

"I suppose she was beautiful. Yes. Well?" was the curt and somewhat surprised rejoinder.

"I hope," Peter went on, effacing himself more and more, "that I do not need to tell you that I am devoted to your interests?"

"I pay you to be," was the curt, cynical response.

"Yes, sir, you pay me too liberally, and that's why I try to do my duty. It is a new and painful duty now, sir."

"Then waste no time in doing it, Harriem," said the other, as impatiently as he ever permitted himself to speak.

"It was quite by accident, sir, but as I went home last night, I saw this girl being embraced and kissed on one of the side streets by a young man."

"Discharge her! Why should I be bothered with the shameless story?"

"The young man, sir," said Peter, dropping his voice to a sibilant whisper, "was Walter."

A dead silence followed. Silas Hardman grew white, and the hand that held the ebony penholder trembled a little. Then the lines around his mouth hardened, and he spoke.

"You did well to tell me. You have the honor of my name at heart. You shall not regret it. We expect these things of young men about town. I only wish it had been with some one not in our employ. We

will have to provide for the girl in some way. Walter must be more careful. He will be here this morning."

Peter knew it would be unwise to press the subject, and only said:

"I hope, sir, you will not let me incur Mr. Walter's ill will by revealing my part in the matter."

"Certainly not. Go!"

And that was how the subject of the working girl's probable ruin was dismissed from the mind of Silas Hardman. It would be demoralizing to discipline to have Walter ruining the salesgirls of Hardman & Son.

Walter came in just as Peter was leaving the office. The latter bowed with a cringing humility that disgusted Walter, and made him return it with a curt nod.

"Good morning, father!" he said cheerily, as the door closed on the shambling head clerk.

The change in the expression of Silas Hardman was something marvelous. It could be seen that the love and affection which the ordinary man bestows on many was in him all concentrated on Walter.

"My boy," he murmured, "what is it this morning? More money for your extravagance, eh, you young dog?"

"No, father," replied Walter; "you never let me have a chance to run short of money. I came to see you about a more important matter than that."

"More important than money!" cried his father, ris-

ing and slapping him genially on the shoulder. "Oh, oh, what is that, I would like to know?"

He laughed as he spoke. No one but Walter ever heard him laugh.

"Love and marriage are more important than money, father, I think."

"Oh-o!" said his father; "it has come to this, has it? Well, my boy, I am rejoiced to hear it. But, Walter, this is a very busy day with me. I shall be home at four o'clock this afternoon. Let us leave the matter till then. Will that suit? I shall be rejoiced to talk with you about it then."

"All right, father, I would not have come here, only I was afraid I would have no other chance to talk with you. You are so busy. I wish you would let me help you."

"Tut, tut! your business is to enjoy yourself, Walter. Oh, by the way!"

He lowered his voice and drew Walter toward the window that looked out on Sixth Avenue. Walter stared wonderingly at him.

"What is it, father?" he asked.

"Walter," said his father, "I know well enough that young men will be young men. I don't want you to be a saint. I know, too, what a temptation a pretty girl is wherever you find her. I never had time for

that sort of thing, myself, but, of course, it is different with you."

Walter flushed and looked uncomfortable, but did not quite comprehend.

"Well, father?" he said, looking into the serious face of the other.

"Well," Silas Hardman said, with an expression that told how sorry he was to find any fault with his son, "I would not inquire into your little escapades, and I don't mean to say there is any harm in them, only I wish you would not select any of the girls of the establishment. See?"

The flush of embarrassment died out of Walter's cheeks, and gave place to a dull white.

"Just what do you mean, father?" he asked, in a low tone.

"There, now! don't be hurt, Walter," the other said soothingly. "I happened to hear how you had been kissing her on the street last night. But don't look so worried over it. I don't think anything of it, my boy. I know what young men of fashion are. Now, good-by and this afternoon we will talk over this matter of your marriage. By the way, be careful not to let Eunice get wind of the pretty little salesgirl. Good-by!"

"Father!" Walter's face was white, and there was a note of vehement indignation in his voice.

"Well, Walter? I am afraid you are angry with me. I didn't mean to make you angry. I thought I was doing the right thing, my boy."

"You don't understand," Walter said, in a low tone. "I did not come here to speak of marriage with Eunice Carroll. I——"

"Well, never mind! I had set my heart on Eunice, but if there is some one else just as good, I shall make no objection. If that is all, why——"

"But it is not all, father. I came to speak of one a thousand times more good and beautiful than Eunice Carroll."

"What a persistent boy!" said his father, in a sort of good-natured impatience. "Why won't you wait until this afternoon?"

"Because there is not one moment to lose before I set you right. I could not go away and leave the one I love under an imputation so false and outrageous, so insulting and base. I must tell you now, father, that the woman I love and will make my wife is that sales-girl of whom you have spoken such terrible words."

Silas Hardman turned ghastly white and looked at Walter with incredulous, yet horrified eyes.

"Walter!" he gasped.

"Yes, father, it is true," answered Walter, throwing his head back with a gesture of proud nobility; "I love Viola Redmond, and intend to make her my wife!"

CHAPTER V.

THE GREATEST DEVOTION.

All his life long Walter had been indulged by his father in every whim; it seemed to him that his father could refuse him nothing.

Perhaps the same thought flashed through the mind of Silas Hardman as he turned his white, set face toward his son.

Never before had there been even a difference between them; for Walter had never asked for anything that his father had not been more than willing to grant him.

The first impulse of the elder man was to break out in furious denial of Walter's right to choose for himself in this matter.

But, as he gazed into the defiant face of his son, it came to him that it might be easier to make a breach than to heal it.

With any other person he would have been hard and unyielding. It seemed impossible to be so with Walter; and yet he did not dream of letting his son have his own way.

The hard, stern light faded out of his eyes as he looked at the handsome face of the boy he worshiped,

and it came to him that there was more than one way of having his will.

"Is your heart so set on this girl, Walter?" he said, in a low tone.

"I can never love any but her, father," answered Walter, with a secret exultation at seeing how mild his father was.

It seemed to him that this was turning out exactly as he had expected. His father could not cross him.

"Are you sure of it?" the other asked. "How long have you known her?"

"I have known her for about three months," Walter answered eagerly. "I loved her from the moment I saw her, and I have grown to love her better every day."

Silas Hardman bit his lip with anger. It was not, as he had hoped, merely the infatuation of a young man for a pretty face.

"Are you engaged?" his father asked.

"Yes, I told her of my love last night, and went home with her to ask her mother's consent."

"And the mother," sneered Silas Hardman, "was only too glad to say yes."

Walter smiled triumphantly.

"You are entirely mistaken, father," he said quickly. "She said she could not consent to the engagement unless you consented first. She would not have it

look as if she and her daughter had entrapped the son of a rich man."

"And what did you say to that, my boy?" the older man inquired.

"I said you had never denied me anything yet, and I did not believe you would begin when my whole happiness was dependent on your consent."

"Do you mean, then, Walter," said the older man, "that if I say no, it will be final with you?"

Walter threw his head back with his proud gesture.

"No, sir; I would not like to run counter to your wishes, but this is a matter in which I admit of no interference."

"And you would marry her though I refused my consent?" his father asked, eying Walter keenly. "What then becomes of the unwillingness of the mother? Is the daughter ready to defy her parent, too?"

"I have not asked her, nor considered it," Walter replied. "I was sure you would consent if you knew that my happiness depended on it. And if you will but see her, father, and speak with her, I am sure you will consent."

"I have seen her. What is her name?"

"Viola Redmond."

"Ah, yes! And you think she will marry you whether I consent or not?"

"I think she so loves me that she will wait until I have earned the right to go to her and say that I can take care of her by my own efforts," Walter answered.

"Then, if I refuse, you will cut loose from the father who has given his whole life to you?" queried Silas Hardman, his voice breaking with an emotion that was strange in his breast.

Walter went over to his father and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Why do you put it that way, father?" he said. "I would do anything else but give her up. I cannot do that. If I told you I would, I could not keep my promise, for I love her with a passion that would control me in spite of all. Why not consent? She is all that even you could ask. She is poor, it is true, but what of that? We are rich enough. And she has such beauty, purity, and goodness as you could find in no other woman. Eunice Carroll is not to be thought of in comparison with Viola."

The old man walked up and down the room, his brain seething with fierce, furious thoughts toward the girl who tried to rob him of his son.

But he betrayed nothing in his hard, impassive face. He had schooled his countenance, long ago, never to betray what was in his heart.

"And if I consent," he said slowly, stopping and

facing Walter, "would you be willing to wait the time set by me before your marriage?"

"There is little I would not do to earn your consent, father!" cried Walter, with eager joy.

A gleam of triumph lighted up the cold eyes of Silas Hardman.

"I distrust a love that is so sudden," he said slowly. Walter smiled confidently.

"If that is all," he said, "you need have no fear. I love her truly, and can never love any other."

"But how can you be sure that she loves you equally well?" his father asked.

"If you knew her you would not ask that!" Walter responded, with a lover's confidence. "She is truth itself."

"How can you be sure," his father persisted, "that you will not change? You have seen so little of the world. If you had done as I wished you to, if you had visited all the gay capitals of Europe and met the beauties there—if you had gone the rounds of the fashionable summer resorts as I have begged you to do, you might have seen some one who would be more to you than this pretty salesgirl."

"That is impossible, father," answered Walter earnestly. "I love Viola, and it is not possible to love more than one in all the world as I love her. I might have liked some other well enough to think I could

wed her. But if in the workings of fate I had afterward seen Viola, I should have been obliged to love her even as I do now."

In his heart Silas Hardman cursed the girl; but on his thin lips there was an incredulous smile, as if he knew his son was only talking the nonsense of youth.

"If I thought that," he said, "I would not hesitate a moment; but I cannot believe it, knowing the world as I do."

"If you could put me to the test in any way," Walter said eagerly, "you would find that what I say is true."

Again the cold eyes gleamed with furtive triumph. It was the point to which, with his icy cunning, he had been leading his son.

"A test," he said, as if he had not before thought of such a thing. "How can there be a test? If I could think of any I would gladly accept your suggestion."

He thus threw the burden of the idea on Walter, and the latter, in his open honesty, never dreamed that all his father had said before was but to lead him up to this thought.

"We can find a test," Walter said quickly, pleased with the thought. "Try us anyhow you please."

His father put out his hand with a smile.

"Walter," he said, "I was vexed when you told me the truth, but it was the best thing to do. I do seek

your happiness above everything else. I had other plans for you, but if you can be happy only in this way, why, we must be reconciled to it."

Walter shook his hand with fervent joy.

"You are always good to me," he said. "You do consent, then?"

"Consent! Well, I suppose it amounts to that. You spoke of a test. I do not wish you to take a step you will regret. I must think of some test, if I can. If I cannot, then I must submit and take your word for it."

"Thank you, sir! oh, thank you! I have not told you, because it was impossible, how much I love Viola. And you will love her, too."

Silas Hardman smiled grimly.

"You talk as if you had passed successfully through the test you suggested. Why, I cannot even be sure that you will be willing to apply the test when I have thought of it."

"I will, father," cried Walter eagerly. "Do not be afraid of that. I shall be glad to prove to you the depth and strength of my passion for her."

"You promise, then, that you will not rebel and say the test is too severe?"

"You will not make it an unreasonable one?" queried Walter.

His father laughed in his grim way, but Walter saw by his face that he was pleased.

"You may, and no doubt will, think it unreasonable, but I shall endeavor to think of something which shall be fair to you and to her."

"Then you need not doubt that I will accept your judgment, father. When will you let me know what it is?"

"I shall be home at four this afternoon. By that time I shall have thought of something. Come there."

Walter smiled joyously, and caught up his hat.

"I shall be there, father," he said. "Sorry to have interrupted your morning. Good-by!"

"You will say nothing to the girl until we have talked the matter over and reached a final decision?" his father said.

"I shall not be able to see her until to-night," Walter answered. "I am to meet her and take her home to-night when she leaves the store. I would not attract attention to her by talking with her in the store."

"That is right," his father said. "Good-by, then, and don't bother a busy man any more, you idle dog!"

"I would not be an idle dog if you would only let me work," Walter replied, with a joyous laugh.

Silas Hardman stood at his desk in silence for a moment after the door closed; then, with a sudden hardening of the lines about the straight mouth, he pushed the electric bell which he used to call Peter Harriem.

CHAPTER VI.

"NEVER WED SUCH A GIRL."

Peter was sitting at his desk, his long, lean legs wound about each other, his yellow teeth gnawing viciously at his scanty mustache, when the bell summoned him to his employer.

He would have given all the world for the chance to hear all that passed between the father and son, but circumstances were not favorable for listening at the door.

He had rendered it so purposely when he did not dream that anybody but himself would hold confidential conversations with Silas Hardman.

Walter had passed him without noticing him, and in the furtive glance Peter stole at his handsome face he saw that it was irradiated with happiness.

Then, while the bell was still ringing, he rose and gazed after the young man instead of hastening with celerity to his employer.

He waited until he saw Walter pass by the counter where Viola was stationed—where he had put her, in fact, so that he might surreptitiously feast his eyes on her beauty.

He noticed that Walter did not stop to say any-

thing, but that he gave a quick, almost-imperceptible nod, which she seemed to comprehend, for in an instant her fair face was suffused with a flush of happiness.

"Has the old fool yielded in this as in everything else?" he hissed to himself. "Will he consent to let that whelp ruin his salesgirl? Curse him if he has! I will fight him, too. No one shall take her from me."

He turned and crept in his stealthy way to the office upstairs, where Silas Hardman was impatiently awaiting him.

He glided into the room, casting one furtive glance at the hard face of the old man, and then taking his place in front of the desk with humble attention.

"Finish the papers!" the old man said curtly.

The papers were finished, and Peter made his usual report.

In fact all the business of the morning was concluded, and Peter, with fierce chagrin, believed he was to be dismissed without hearing a word that would enlighten him.

He turned toward the door with reluctant step. The old man let him reach the door and place his hand on the knob ere he recalled him.

"Stop! there is something else," he said. "You did well to inform me of what you saw."

"I am glad if I have pleased you," Peter whined, his shifting gaze telling him that there was more to come.

He did not, however, take his hand from the knob, but stood there as if he had no thought of remaining longer than to hear a brief word or two.

"Come back here," said Silas Hardman. "You thought Walter intended the ruin of this girl—Viola Something."

"Viola Redmond; yes, sir," assented Peter, his snaky eyes trying to read the old man's thoughts.

"Well, you were wrong. He wanted to marry her. To marry her! Curse the girl!" said the old man, with a quiet vehemence and passion more terrible than a violent outburst.

"Im-possible!" ejaculated Peter slowly.

"Yes, you may well say impossible, but it is so. My son marry such as she! I do not know by what low cunning she entrapped my boy, but it is certain that he is infatuated with her."

He thumped the desk in anger. Peter stared at him with growing passion.

Why had Walter gone out in triumphant happiness? Had his father consented to the marriage in spite of his dislike to it?

Well, even that should never be. Did they think Peter Harriem could be thrust aside so easily? Let them see!

"And you consented to the marriage?" insinuated the cringing wretch.

"Consented!" repeated Silas Hardman, with angry vehemence. "Why do you think that?"

"I saw Mr. Walter's face when he passed me. He looked as happy as one does who has gained his will."

"Ah!" said the old man briefly. "He thinks I have consented. But we shall see. Do you wish to help me in this affair? It may be worth your while, even though it is not strictly business."

"Anything is strictly business that concerns you, sir," answered Peter, in his wheedling tone.

"Yes, I know you are faithful, or I would not have thought of you. I did not dare refuse Walter for fear he would do something rash. He is innocent and off his guard; cunning will accomplish the same end better. He must not marry that girl."

Peter softly and stealthily rubbed his lean hands together. The game was to be in his hands after all.

"It would be a disgrace," he murmured. "I will do anything I can. Have you any idea of a way, sir?"

"Yes; and I need you to help me carry it out."

"You know you can depend on me, sir."

"I shall make it worth your while," the old man said coldly. He intended to pay well for the service.

"Walter has consented to submit to a test of his love. I thought to send him away for a year. I could send

him to London and Paris to transact some trifling business for the house."

"And in the meantime," murmured Peter, his snaky eyes gleaming, "the girl could be weaned from him. Is that the plan, sir?"

The cold eyes of his employer rested on his sallow face.

"She weaned from him! That is a foolish thought. Do you think she will ever give him up while there is a ghost of a chance? No. She must be placed in a position which will render marriage with Walter impossible. Do you comprehend?"

"Not—not quite," answered Peter, in a low, husky voice.

"I thought you were keener than that," sneered Silas. "Well, you know that my son would never wed a girl whose name has been dragged in the mire of infamy."

"I think I understand now," said Peter slowly. "Would—would you expect me to compass that result?"

Silas Hardman glanced contemptuously over the gaunt, shambling form of the confidential clerk, and gave vent to a short, scornful laugh.

"You don't look much like a lady killer, Harriem; but I will leave the details to you. Will you undertake it?"

A flush passed over the ugly face of the younger

man. He did not relish being reminded of his lack of attractions.

"Let me see if I fully understand my task," he said, as if he had no feeling whatever. "I am to so situate the girl that she cannot marry your son. If I can succeed in wedding her to some one—that will do."

"You have stated it exactly," said Mr. Hardman icily, and with as little compunction as if they had been discussing the life of a chicken.

Peter stood quite still, except for a gentle rubbing of his hands together.

Mr. Hardman looked at him for a moment, and then smiled.

"I see. You are wondering what your reward for all this is to be."

"It would seem more businesslike," replied Peter humbly, "if all the details were to be settled now."

"You do not care to trust to my generosity?" queried the other, looking keenly at Peter.

"Generosity," said Peter, with the utmost humility, "is a word that means so many different things."

"For example?" queried the other.

"At this moment," answered Peter, with a furtive glance upward, "when you have need of me, it might mean a slight share in the business of Hardman & Son. After the affair was accomplished, it might mean no more than a raise of salary."

The face of Silas Hardman flushed with anger.

"Do you mean," he said, in a low, incisive tone, "that you have the audacity to dream of being a member of the firm?"

Peter had never shrunk together more humbly than at that moment. Yet his response was perfectly clear, though spoken in the most whining tones.

"All of us have our mad ambitions," he answered. "And I am sure nothing could be more honorable than the desire to be a member of such a firm as that of Hardman & Son."

"A mad ambition, truly," said Silas harshly. "Have you really dreamed of such a thing? And do you make it the price of doing this for me?"

"I know how presumptuous it must seem," whined Peter; "but it is an honorable ambition."

"Is it your price?" demanded Silas Hardman, his brows contracted.

"I would not put it quite that way," responded Peter, cringing and squirming as if with a sense of his own unworthiness.

"But is it your price?" persisted the old man.

"I don't see how I could undertake the risk except for some adequate recompense," said Peter.

"Very well," said Silas, in a decisive tone. "I will give you a tenth interest in the firm if you succeed in separating those two."

"Oh, thank you, sir! How can I believe my ears? A member of the great firm of Hardman & Son! Oh, I can hardly believe it!"

Silas Hardman eyed him curiously.

"You have evidently formed a plan which you believe will be successful," he said to him. "Is it so?"

"I think I can succeed," answered Peter, in the purring tone of a great lean cat.

"Under the circumstances I ought not to be troubled with any knowledge of the details," said the old man. "All you have to do is to earn your reward. All I have to do is to give it."

"That is all," answered Peter, twining his long, bony fingers in and out. "Of course, you will give me a little memorandum, saying that I am to be made a partner. It will be such a spur to my activity to have it where I can look at it now and then."

Silas bit his lip. Peter was one who thought of everything. The old man had made up his mind, however, and took up a sheet of paper and began to write. When he had finished, he handed it to Peter, who read:

"I, Silas Hardman, do hereby solemnly agree with Peter Harriem that on the day he brings me proof that he has rendered it impossible for my son to marry Viola Redmond, I will give him a one-tenth interest in the business of Hardman & Son.

"SILAS HARDMAN."

"That is all that is necessary," said Peter, "excepting a witness and an acknowledgment before a notary public."

"You shall have that, too," said Silas, with an icy smile. "Neither witness nor notary need know the contents of the paper. Anything else?"

"It will cost a great deal of money, probably," said Peter, his little eyes glittering greedily.

"I will put five thousand dollars to your credit in any bank you designate," said the old man. "Is that all?"

"That is all for myself. But I would have you stipulate with Mr. Walter that there is to be nothing binding between him and the girl while he is away."

"Wise precaution! I hope you will succeed."

"No man ever had more to work for," answered Peter, unable to subdue his exultation.

CHAPTER VII.

"SHE IS A WORKING GIRL."

Walter could not have told how he passed the part of the day that intervened between leaving his father at the store and seeing him again in the afternoon.

He had won his consent when he had not dared to hope for it, but had braced himself for a violent scene and a determined denial. And after that he had had a glimpse of the adorable face of his darling, and had exchanged with her an ecstatic look of hope and happiness.

He went about as if walking on air, devouring slow-moving time in all sorts of ways, and ending by going home and waiting there until his father came.

"You have determined on a test, father?" he cried, the moment he entered the library.

"Yes. I wonder if you will fight against it?"

"Tell it to me—let me know what it is. It must needs be a very unreasonable one if I do not hail it with joy," answered Walter.

"Well, I have combined business with it," his father replied. "It occurred to me that in the time to come, when you had tasted every pleasure, you might like to know something of the business."

"It is my dearest wish, father."

"Well, we need a man to represent us in London and Paris," said the old man.

Walter's face fell. He suspected in a moment what the test was to be.

"You are going to send me away?" he cried.

"For a year."

"Oh, father!"

"Does it seem long, Walter? Yes, of course it does; but a year is only a year, and it is soon gone by. Go there and remain the year, and if, when you return, you find that you still love this girl, I will place no obstacle in your way. You shall do as you will."

"It is a severe test, father," Walter protested. "If it were only that we could meet occasionally. It is hard to be separated from the one we love."

"A year is soon gone, Walter. You said you would agree to the test."

"Let me consult with Viola," said Walter.

"Consult with her? And what if she says she cannot have it? Will you go back in your promise to me to accept a reasonable test?"

"She will not ask me to do that," Walter answered, realizing at once that an appeal to her would make no difference.

"Then why appeal to her?" his father said. "Why

not settle this matter between ourselves? Will you go, Walter? It is not much to ask of you."

"Yes, I will go. She will understand. I will go, father; I can trust her, and she can trust me. I know that she would be the first to insist if I were to ask her. But what of her while I am gone?"

The wily old man hesitated, then spoke:

"That is all that troubles me. If she is what you say, she will be too high-minded to accept pecuniary help from you or me."

"That is true," Walter said; "and yet, to know that she is working so hard all that year. Don't you think, father, that your girls work altogether too hard?"

The old man bit his thin lip to keep back the sneer that rose to it.

"You shall regulate that when you are managing the business," said he. "In the meantime, as to Viola. The only way I can think of is to give her a better position and more pay. I can do that without letting her know that I am watching over her."

"How good and generous you always are when I am concerned!" Walter cried.

"On whom else should I lavish my affection, my boy? Then that is settled. By the way, it might be better not to let her have any idea that I am doing anything for her."

"I will not speak of it to her!" Walter said eagerly.

"And another thing," said his father: "I think there should be no positive engagement. Just tell her that I am willing that you should marry if you continue to love when you return. There must be no engagement."

Walter smiled joyously.

"There is no need of an engagement, father. She and I know what our hearts mean. Oh, I am impatient to see her and tell her. I wish you would see her and talk to her. You would love her. I know you would."

"I saw her twice to-day," his father answered. "She is very beautiful. I hope she will be a good subject for promotion, for I shall not be comfortable until I have put it in her power to earn more money."

"You are so good," said Walter; and so the arrangement was made.

That night Walter was waiting near the corner of Sixth Avenue for her, and had her little hand clasped in his in an instant.

Neither saw the prowling, shambling shadow that glided after them on the other side of the way.

Peter Harriem had no reason for following and watching them now, but he could not help it. It seemed as if he followed them in order that he might suffer the pain and misery of witnessing their loving talk.

Mrs. Redmond was sitting propped up in a chair

when the lovers entered the shabby but exceedingly neat little room where the invalid passed her days.

"Oh, mamma!" Viola murmured, "it is all right."

The invalid looked almost incredulously at the handsome face of Walter, as if she would detect there something that would give the lie to the happy words of her child.

"Your father has consented?" she asked wonderingly.

"He has consented in a way," answered Walter. "I am to go away for a year to attend to the business of the firm. There is to be no set engagement, but if we still love on my return, we are to be married."

"Yes, that is wise," said the widow slowly.

"No set engagement!" laughed Viola. "As if we needed any promise to hold us faithful to each other. But," she added, with a sigh, "a year is such a long time."

Peter Harriem, meanwhile, had turned away from a contemplation of the humble tenement into which Walter and Viola had entered.

He sped along the streets as if with a defined purpose in his mind, and more than one person stopped to look back at him, so weird and uncanny an object did he seem.

He stopped in front of a mansion on Madison Avenue.

He looked up and hesitated for a moment, rubbing his hands, and seeming to shrink down between his high shoulders in self-abasement.

Then with a sidelong movement he ran up the steps of the stoop and rang the bell.

"Is Miss Carroll at home?" he asked of the servant who opened the door and stared at him in a most supercilious fashion.

"Who is it shall I say?" the man demanded insolently.

Peter looked up from under his eyebrows, and answered slowly:

"The confidential clerk of Hardman & Son."

The man, like all servants, knew enough of the private affairs of the household to flush with mortification, and to hasten to invite the unprepossessing clerk into the house, saying:

"Oh, oh! I beg pardon! Walk right in! I will tell Miss Carroll's maid. In there, please."

Peter crept into the reception room, with a sneer on his thin lips, muttering as he rubbed his hands over and over again:

"How they all cringe before wealth and power! Some day I shall be Hardman & Son, and then how I shall enjoy my power! Then I can make Viola as great a lady as this proud girl whose rustling silks I hear now."

He cringed and bowed as she entered the room with a wondering look on her dark, haughty face.

"Did you come with any message?" she asked, when, after a stare of proud inquiry at him, she saw that he was not disposed to speak.

"No, I brought no message, if you please, Miss Carroll. I came on my own account to ask you to do me a service."

"I do not understand," she said coldly. "My maid told me that you were the head clerk, or something of the sort, of Hardman & Son. Is it not so?"

"Yes, Miss Carroll, it is so, and I have taken this very great liberty because—— I wonder if you will forgive me if I speak freely?"

"Speak freely," she said, inspired in spite of herself with uneasiness.

"You will not betray me to Mr. Walter, I hope," he said, glancing up furtively to see how she took the utterance of that name.

A quick, eager flush passed over her face, and then was hidden under a mask of indifference.

"Certainly not, if it is anything that does not concern him," she answered.

"But it does concern him," whined Peter, writhing humbly. "It concerns him and me and the girl I love—such a beautiful girl, miss!"

The black eyes flamed and then looked cold.

"She is a Working Girl."

"I do not comprehend you," she said. "Go on!"

"I have your kind permission to go on?" he queried.

"You heard me," she responded.

"He says he is in love with her and wishes to marry her," Peter said abruptly, his snaky eyes never leaving the darkly beautiful face, and reading every tremor in it.

She started, and flames darted from her eyes. Her cheek paled.

Then her lips parted as she said coldly:

"Who is the girl?"

"She works in the store—a salesgirl. Oh, so beautiful! Mr. Hardman has commissioned me—— May I proceed?"

She stamped her foot angrily.

"I tell you to go on. Why do you keep asking permission. You know you may continue with your story."

"I was not sure I would not offend," Peter said, in a cringing tone. "Thank you. Mr. Hardman wishes you to be his son's wife. Don't be offended with me! And he has commissioned me to break off the other—the entanglement."

Eunice Carroll's face was crimson, but her self-control was wonderful, and she only said calmly:

"Why did you come here?"

"To see if you would help me," he answered, his beady eyes flashing.

"I! How?"

"Walter is going to Europe to remain a year. Suppose the girl should become infamous while he was away? Suppose she should marry another? If you would help me, I would answer for the rest."

"How could I help you?" she asked.

"She could be sent to you to show you some laces. If there were jewels on your table at the time, and if one should be missed, and afterward found in her pocket. Ah! An arrest, imprisonment, thrown out of work, unable to find it anywhere. A sick mother, too, starving, dying, maybe. Ah!"

He had crept up to her as he spoke until he was close by her side and was pouring his awful picture into her ear.

She shut her teeth hard together, and whispered huskily:

"Send her with laces!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEGINNING OF INFAMY.

Walter had taken his departure, and Viola had been promoted to the lace department.

The parting had been a grief to her, and she had clung to Walter, sobbing and murmuring words of love and devotion.

"Be true to me and our love!" Walter had said.

"I will be true through everything," she had responded.

Viola had studied hard to learn her new duties, happy in the increase of pay that had come to her. It seemed to her that the future was very bright.

"Miss Redmond," said the head of the department to her the day before Christmas, "here is a package of laces to be taken at once to this address. The young lady is a good customer, and I wish her to be pleased."

Viola took the package, knowing that sometimes such things were done for their best customers.

She started and flushed as she looked at the address. She had heard of Eunice Carroll from Walter, and had read of her in the fashion notes in the daily papers.

Perhaps she was not sorry to see the woman from

whom she had taken Walter. She was only human, and she wished to see with her own eyes if Eunice was as beautiful as the papers all said.

She took rather more time than usual in the cloak-room before she started. She was naturally not unwilling to appear at her best before Eunice Carroll.

It was impossible for her not to feel a little awe when she entered the magnificent mansion on Madison Avenue, and she was ushered into the boudoir of the fashionable beauty.

There was a bright glitter in the sloe-black eyes of Eunice Carroll when the salesgirl was brought to her. She stared at her with a cold, hard light growing in the black orbs.

Viola cast her eyes down in her embarrassment, and then stated her errand, beginning to untie the package as she spoke.

"You may go, Stella," Eunice said to her maid. "Never mind the jewels! I have no doubt the girl is honest."

Viola turned crimson. What an insolent way to speak of her!

No wonder Walter had not liked the proud creature, in spite of her imperious beauty.

In her humility, Viola did not hesitate to decide that Eunice was more beautiful than she; though more

than once she had heard herself admiringly called the Belle of the Dry Goods District.

She could not help flashing an indignant glance at the jewels that were spread out on the dressing table. The maid noticed the glance as she went from the room.

Viola went on untying the package and presently had spread the laces out so that Eunice might see them.

Eunice, meanwhile, was staring at the girl, whose beauty had won Walter Hardman.

And as she looked, she was forced to admit that such brown eyes and dimpled cheeks must be very winsome to a man.

She studied vengefully the low, white brow, and the cherry, pouting lips; the curling chestnut hair, and the snowy throat.

Then she saw that the hands were white, dimpled, with tapering fingers, and that the form that was displayed by the snugly fitting coat was perfect in its proportions.

She wished to hear the voice that would issue from between the dewy lips and framed a question.

"Have you brought samples of all your best laces?"

"No, miss; I have only a selected few. The manager thought you would not like to see too many."

The voice was sweet and flutelike in its clear, musical

tones; and Eunice Carroll hated the innocent girl with a deadly, unreasoning hatred.

"Place the box on the dressing table," she said, "and let me have the laces in my lap."

Viola, remembering what Eunice had said of the jewels, placed the box on the table without approaching nearer than she could help, and then stepped far away from it.

"Tell me the prices," said Eunice.

Viola stepped to her side and looked at the marks on the laces, reading them off as she did so.

Her hands were engaged, her eyes busy, she unconscious.

The hand of Eunice Carroll flashed in the light, and a triumphant glitter filled her black eyes.

"I will take these two," she said sharply, and thrust the others into Viola's hands.

Viola gathered up the laces, folded them neatly, and was taking the box from the table when Stella, the maid, entered, having been summoned by the ringing of the bell.

"Help her!" Eunice said sharply.

The maid assisted Viola as much as she could, and showed her out of the room.

"Put the jewels away, now," said Eunice. "I hope they are all right."

There was a prolonged silence. Stella was carefully

putting the jewels away: Suddenly the silence was broken by a sharp cry.

"Oh, Miss Eunice, the diamond solitaire! I cannot find it! Oh, let me call the girl back."

"Search first. Be sure! I do not suspect you. We must not be foolish about it. Are you sure it was there? Is it not in its place?"

"It was here, Miss Eunice. Let me call her back. It is not in its place. I will call her back, Miss Eunice."

"It is too late for that now. I heard the door close. Send James for a detective. He will know what to do. Ah! that miserable thief!"

Stella flew from the room on her errand. Eunice Carroll fell back in her chair with white face and flaming eyes.

"It is the beginning of her infamy," she murmured.

CHAPTER IX.

“WHO SAID MARRIAGE?”

Viola's nature was sweet and gentle, but it was not weak. She would endure and suffer much from those she loved, but she was too high-spirited not to feel an insult keenly.

The manner of Eunice Carroll, more than her words, had stung Viola, and she left the house of the haughty beauty with her heart throbbing with indignation.

She had expected to find her cold and haughty, but had not dreamed that she would insult one whose only crime could be her poverty.

At least it never occurred to Viola that Eunice could have any reason for hating her and wishing her ill.

It was no longer difficult for her to comprehend why Walter had not loved the one chosen for him by his father.

“She is very beautiful,” she murmured, “and if looks were all, Walter might easily care more for her than for me, but I hope I shall never have her proud, cold spirit.”

It would have surprised Viola had she known that almost any man would have declared her more beautiful than Eunice.

She was modest, and her modesty did not in the least detract from her exquisite beauty in the eyes of the men who looked back at her that day as she walked briskly along the crowded streets.

Fortunately, she was not one to brood over a wrong, and it was not long before she had forgotten the purse-proud, insolent manner of the wealthy beauty, and was enjoying the crowds of Christmas buyers which crowded the streets.

Partly because the air was keen and sharp, and partly because she did not wish to waste the time of her employers, she stepped briskly along, threading her way with rosy cheeks and dancing eyes through the throngs.

She did not like it when rude men stared at her, but once she laughed outright when she heard a lady say to a friend:

"How strange it is that these shopgirls should be so pretty!"

Viola laughed heartily, and wondered why it should be strange that a working girl should be pretty.

She was still laughing softly when she entered the store of Hardman & Son, and made her way through the crowds that filled it.

"Why are you laughing?" one of the girls asked her, as she took her place behind the lace counter after taking off her things in the cloakroom.

There was hardly time to tell why she was laughing, so she merely answered gayly :

"Oh, because I feel happy."

"I wonder at that," the other said fretfully; "I should think it would be enough to dampen any one's spirit to have a sick mother and such small pay to support her on."

The forewoman, who had listened, shrugged her shoulders and said in a rather spiteful way:

"You mustn't forget that Viola is a pet here. Hasn't she just been promoted when some of the others have been sent away?"

Viola was busy showing a customer some laces, but she heard the remark, and turned to say good-naturedly:

"I admit that I ought to be happy on that account. But that is not the only reason for my happiness."

"I guess Viola's got a lover," laughed one of the other girls softly.

Viola blushed and began to tell the customer the merits of the lace she was looking at.

The other girls noticed her confusion and laughed as they showed goods to customers.

The customers could not hear what they said to each other; but all the time they were selling they kept up a fire of mischievous talk.

"As sure as you live, Rose," said one of the girls

who had not yet spoken, "Viola has a lover. I knew she couldn't be long without one. My! look how red she is!"

The girls laughed again.

"It is to be worn at the neck," said Viola to her customer, trying to pretend that she had not heard, though her cheeks were the color of a peony.

"How well it suits her!" murmured Rose. "She ought to let him see her with it on. He would give it to her for a wedding present."

Viola had put the lace to her white throat to show the effect.

"He may be too poor to buy it," said the other teasingly.

"I know better than that," said Rose, as she measured off three yards of lace trimming. "Such a beauty as Viola would never marry a poor man."

"Who said anything about marrying," said the other.

"Why, Molly!" said Rose; "would you marry for money?"

"If I could," answered Molly, with a laugh; "wouldn't you, Viola?"

Viola had gained command of herself by this time and was able to turn around and answer laughingly:

"What should I know about it? I suppose I shall marry the man I love if he has the good sense to ask me."

“I’ve noticed,” laughed Rose, “that Viola always goes home alone. I wonder why that is?”

“You mean,” said Molly, “that she leaves the store alone. How do you know she goes home alone? I know she doesn’t. Look at her face now!”

Viola had not suspected that anybody had ever seen her with Walter, and the thought of it brought the rich blood to her round cheeks.

She could hear the girls giggling, and it seemed to her that there was a faint smile on the face of her customer.

“Is it anybody we know?” demanded Rose eagerly.

“I should say so. Just see how she blushes!” replied Molly, bent on teasing Viola.

“Do tell us who it is,” said Rose.

No one to have seen the girls would have supposed they had anything else in their heads than the selling of laces they were showing the ladies on the other side of the counter.

“What would you say——” began Molly, when Viola turned quickly and said pleadingly:

“Please don’t, Molly.”

Molly started in surprise.

“You don’t really mean anything,” answered Viola in distress.

She could not bear to have it noised abroad in the store that Walter was her lover.

"Tell me who it is, Molly," said Rose, passing behind her to reach down a box of laces. "If you don't tell me I'll pinch you."

"Please, Molly," pleaded Viola, her cheeks burning.

"It is too good to keep," answered Molly, stifling a laugh. "Rose, it's——"

"I think it awfully mean of you, Molly," pleaded Viola.

"Quick, Molly!" said Rose, holding the box of laces in her hand.

"Mr. Harriem—sneaking Peter," whispered Molly.

Viola gave vent to a sigh of relief, then laughed as she turned and caught the amazed look on Rose's face.

"Really?" demanded Rose, pausing to talk in violation of the rules of the store.

"No!" said Viola emphatically. "How ridiculous!"

"Young ladies!" said the forewoman angrily, as she came swiftly toward them, "do you wish me to report you? A nice way to deserve promotion!" she added, with a scornful glance at Viola.

She was nearing thirty-five, and disliked the girls in proportion to their youth and beauty.

But Viola was too much relieved to discover that Molly had not guessed right, to care much what Miss Flynn said.

She turned again to the counter and began to wait on the crowds there.

A man with a keen, black eye and a drooping black mustache passed and stared furtively at the girls.

At Viola, when his eyes fell on her, he stared rather longer than at the others, murmuring as he moved on:

"That must be the one, though the mistress and the maid disagreed as to her good looks. A mighty pretty girl! I wonder why one pretty woman hates to acknowledge the beauty of another?"

He was moving on as he soliloquized, and did not stop until he reached the desk occupied by Peter Harriem.

He looked at Peter with the searching look that seemed habitual to him.

Peter returned his glance with a curiosity that seemed to be quickly satisfied, for he asked coldly:

"Did you wish to see me?"

"I wish to see Mr. Hardman, or whoever is the managing head of the firm."

"I am the confidential man," Peter replied. "What is your business?"

"Can I speak to you in private?"

"No one will overhear you here," Peter said.

The man glanced about him with a swift look that seemed to take in everything in sight, and said, in a low tone:

“I am a detective. There is a suspicion of theft against one of your employees, and I am here to investigate it. Will you help me?”

“I think you are mistaken,” Peter said slowly. “If there had been any such charge made, I should have known it. We do not suspect anybody in the establishment.”

“The charge is made by some one outside of the store—a Miss Carroll, in fact.”

“Not Miss Eunice Carroll?” cried Peter, with an assumption of deep surprise.

“Miss Eunice Carroll.”

“Tell me the circumstances,” Peter said. “Of course I will assist you. I hope it is nothing serious. I would not have one of our best customers given any trouble. Who is the person suspected?”

“A diamond ring was stolen, and the person is the girl who took some laces to Miss Carroll from this store.”

“Viola Redmond! utterly impossible! You are mistaken, sir. There is no more faithful girl in the store. She has just been promoted for her good behavior. Oh, it is impossible!”

The detective looked quietly at Peter until he had finished, then said with an imperturbable calmness:

“I did not say she was guilty. She is suspected, and,

if you will assist me, I will endeavor to unravel the facts."

Peter flashed a swift, furtive glance at the detective before he answered:

"I will do anything I can. Hardman & Son would not for the world have any customer subjected to the least annoyance. Shall I send for Miss Redmond?"

"This will not be a good place to question her, particularly if she turns out innocent," the detective said, his keen eyes fixed on Peter with a puzzled expression, which passed away as if by magic the instant Peter raised his eyes.

"Let us go to the cloakroom, then," Peter said; "no one will interrupt us there."

"In the cloakroom, then," the detective said.

"That is the room, there," Peter said. "If you will go to it I will bring Miss Redmond to you, though I am satisfied that the charge will be found unwarranted by the facts."

"Precious sly fox," murmured the detective, as he went toward the cloakroom. "If he had been accused I would have arrested him on his looks. Meanwhile, I'm sorry for the pretty girl."

CHAPTER X.

THE BURNING EYES.

"Miss Redmond, I would like to see you alone for a few minutes."

The oily voice of Peter falling on her ear was the first intimation to Viola that he was near her.

She started, flashed a swift look of roguish chagrin at her two companions who had been teasing her, and stepped from behind the counter after him.

She had no idea that there was anything more in his invitation than a desire on his part to make a plea of business the excuse for talking with her.

Her promotion had acted as a sort of assurance to her that she was under the protection of Mr. Hardman; and she was not afraid of Peter.

She followed him in silence to the cloakroom, rather wondering why he led her thither, and staring in unfeigned surprise when she saw the man who was waiting there.

"This is Miss Redmond," Peter said to the detective. "Miss Redmond, this gentleman wishes to ask you a few questions. I hope you will answer them with perfect frankness."

Viola stared in blank amazement as she noted the solemn, almost pitying face of the detective.

"Are you the person who took some laces from this store to the house of Miss Eunice Carroll?" the detective asked.

"Yes, sir," Viola answered wonderingly.

The eyes of the detective were fixed on her as if they would search out the truth in the very depths of her soul.

He found it extremely difficult to believe in advance of complete evidence that she was guilty of theft. And yet in his experience there had been cases too strange to enable him to say from her appearance that she was guiltless.

"Do you remember seeing some jewels lying on her dressing table?" he asked.

A startled look leaped into her brown eyes. She remembered the words Eunice had uttered to her, and the thrill of impending danger shook her.

"I—I do," she answered, her little hands coming together, and clinging.

"There was a diamond ring lost from the table, and its loss was discovered just after your departure," he said, with slow emphasis, as if he would have every word sink into her brain.

At these words, which were so little short of accusation, the high spirit which was dormant in her soul was aroused; the queenly little head was thrown back; the brown eyes flamed with indignation.

"And does she dare to say that I took her ring?" she cried. "As if I would touch it! How dare she say such a thing?"

"That is just what I said, Viola," Peter said, with an air of anxious solicitude. "Of course such a charge must be proven."

The detective turned from the flushed face of Viola to look at Peter.

"There has been no charge," he said dryly. "The jewels were said to be there, and one of them is said to have been lost. This young lady is not accused. But, like the maid, who was also in the room, she is properly under suspicion, and must remain so until she has permitted such steps to be taken as will prove her innocence. Even if I feel obliged to arrest her, it will prove nothing against her. Innocent persons have been arrested."

"Arrest me!" gasped Viola, quivering with terror at the mere word.

"You shall not be arrested if I can save you, Viola," murmured the oily voice of Peter.

"I only spoke of that as an extreme measure," the detective said. "I suppose you will make no objections to a search."

Viola flushed and drew herself up.

"Is that necessary?" she asked. "I assure you that

I did not go near enough to the table to touch a thing on it."

"I cannot insist upon a search," he said; "but I have a warrant for your arrest, and when you are in custody you will be forced to submit. If you are innocent it will be better to acquiesce now."

Viola tottered.

A warrant for her arrest! It seemed to her as if the disgrace was hers already.

"I will call Miss Flynn," Peter said, and was about to go to the door when the detective stopped him by a quiet yet firm touch on the arm.

"One moment; I will tell you when I need your assistance. Miss Redmond, will you point out to me the garment among these which is yours?"

Viola went with uneven steps to where her sack hung on its hook, and took it down.

She handed it to the detective, who passed it at once to Peter, saying as he did so:

"Please examine the pockets."

"May I?" Peter said, looking at Viola as if to have her comprehend that he was her firm friend.

She could only nod her head, afraid to open her lips lest they should betray her and let out the sob of fear which she was trying to suppress.

Peter thrust his bony fingers into the pockets, feeling a thrill of delight at the thought that the little

hands he would have given so much to hold in his were in the habit of snuggling in these same pockets.

His face wore an expression of sorrow and distress, as if the task were not at all to his liking, but suddenly changed.

He stared from her to the detective.

"Well?" demanded the latter sharply, as with a stride he had the coat in his grasp. "What have you found? Let me see it."

Reluctantly, and as if he was in the greatest pain in doing so, Peter drew from the pocket a ring set with one large brilliant.

"Oh, Viola!" he cried.

"Ah!" said the detective, snatching the ring from the bony fingers of the other and turning to Viola, "how came this in your pocket? Is it yours?"

Viola stared with wide-open, incredulous eyes; her face became ghastly pale, and a terrible fear smote her heart.

"Had some one played a trick on her?" was the question that formed in her brain.

"It—it is not mine," she stammered.

"How came it in your pocket?" demanded the detective.

"I—I do not know. Some one must have placed it there," she said. "I know nothing about it. It is some conspiracy against me."

The detective shrugged his shoulders. He had heard the same plea so many times.

"It may be some accident," Peter suggested, rubbing his hands together in a way to make the detective look at him in disgust.

"It may be," the detective responded, and cast a look on Viola that made her cry out:

"Oh, sir, do not take me to prison! I am innocent; indeed I am innocent. I knew nothing of the presence of the ring there. I would not have touched it for all the world!"

"Must you take her to prison, sir?" Peter asked.

"I must. It is hard to believe her guilty; but I have no choice. Come, Miss Redmond, you will be wise to put on your coat and come with me, without disturbance. It will be better for you in any case."

Viola became so ghastly pale that both the men sprang toward her, but she waved them aside and sank into a chair, murmuring:

"I shall be better in a moment. I am innocent, but I will go with you. Oh, if Walter were only here!"

Peter bit his lip and turned yellow with anger.

"Will you let me have a few words alone with her?" he asked of the detective. "I have good reason for asking. She cannot escape. I will not keep you long."

The detective hesitated, and then seemed to make up his mind quickly.

"Yes; but do not keep me long."

He retired from the room, and Peter glided to the side of the overwhelmed and prostrated girl.

"Viola," he murmured in her ear, "I can save you yet, if you will but listen to me."

She looked up into his face with burning eyes, seeming to search his soul through the mask that hid it. Then she shuddered and turned away with a pitiful moan of anguish.

"I know you are innocent," he said, "but no one else will believe it. The evidence is such that all will think you guilty, and your whole life will be ruined. You will be taken to prison; and after the trial you will be sent to the penitentiary."

"Why do you torture me?" she wailed, turning from him, and making as if to rise and flee to the door.

"I do not say it to torture you," he answered eagerly, in his wheedling voice, "but in order that you may understand. There is one way of escape, however, if you will grasp it."

"Escape!" she said.

"I do not mean to run away," he answered. "You cannot escape that way. The police would soon hunt you down. I meant that you can keep out of prison, and escape all the infamy of this charge."

She looked at him with eyes that should have melted his heart.

"Point out the way," she said miserably.

"I love you madly, Viola. Be my wife and I will save you. Give me your promise and you shall never go to prison."

"I cannot be your wife," she wailed. "I love another. Ah, Heaven, why is he not here to protect me?"

"You love Walter Hardman," Peter said huskily. "I know that, and I know the conditions of his going away. But do you think his father would let you marry Walter with such a charge as this against you? Do you think that even Walter would wed you when you have been sentenced to prison?"

"Oh, do not torture me. Let me go to prison and die, for I know I shall die of shame and agony when I am in that awful place."

"And your mother," he went on, "do you think she will find anybody to care for her while you are in prison—do you think any one will wish to help the mother of one who is a convicted thief?"

"Why do you tempt me?" she cried fiercely. "I do not love you and never can. You know it. Let me go to prison."

"Think of your future!" he said angrily. "Do you know what it will be? Do you know the fate of the outcast? Do you know that you will never again be

able to secure work in this great city? You will have to starve. Will you accept my offer and be my wife?"

"I cannot," she answered. "Oh, sir, why can you not be generous? Why, if you can save me, do you let me go to prison? Why do you exact a price so terrible? Save me and I will give you my gratitude."

"If you will be my wife I will save you, not else. It will cost me a great deal of money."

"Walter will repay you every penny and more," Viola cried, grasping him by the arm in her eager entreaty.

"I know nothing of Walter Hardman," he said, with an angry hiss. "Be my wife and I will save you. Refuse, and I will call in the detective."

"I must refuse," she wailed. "What can I do but refuse?"

He glided to the door and placed his hand on the knob, a malignant expression on his hideous face.

"Once more I give you the chance," he said. "Will you save yourself by becoming my wife?"

"I cannot. Oh, mother, what will become of you?"

He opened the door and beckoned the man in.

"Take her with you," he said.

The detective fixed his eyes on Peter Harriem for but a second, then turned to Viola and said kindly:

"Come, my girl."

CHAPTER XI.

A DETECTIVE BY HER SIDE.

Like one bereft of all power of will, Viola donned her coat and hat, and prepared to follow the detective.

"Pull your veil down over your face," he said curtly, but not unkindly. "And you may go out ahead of me. Do not try to escape. I will join you on the sidewalk."

She did exactly as he bade her, and was moving away, when once more she heard the voice of Peter whisper in her ear:

"There is yet a chance. Say that you will be my wife."

"I cannot," she wailed.

"Please leave her alone," the detective said peremptorily.

Peter scowled and let Viola pass him.

She went into the crowded store with her head down and her feet dragging, feeling as if every one there knew that she was going to prison on the charge of stealing.

Ah! it is not guilt alone that brings horror. The mere touch of the finger of the law seems to cover a sensitive soul with shame.

She stepped into the street like one in a dream. The detective took his place by her side and said, in a low tone:

"Walk ahead and turn the first corner. No one need know that you are under arrest. No one knows me. I will join you when there is no one to see."

She did as he bade her. It seemed to her that if he had told her to walk to her destruction she would have done it in the same mechanical way.

When he joined her he was in the middle of the block, going toward Seventh Avenue. He looked pityingly down at her. She did not speak. The horror of her situation robbed her of speech.

"Will you tell me all about this matter?" he said to her.

"There is nothing to tell you," she said, in a low tone of utter misery.

"I am sure there must be," he answered. "If you are guilty, there is that to tell. If you are innocent, there must be something to tell. You spoke of a conspiracy. Who should conspire against you?"

She looked up at the immobile, sphinxlike face and shook her head.

"I suppose I was mad," she said. "I do not know who should conspire against me."

The very hopelessness betrayed in her sweet voice impressed and touched him.

"Will you tell me what that fellow in the store said to you when you were alone?" he asked.

"He said he would save me if I would marry him."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I love another."

The detective gnawed his mustache, and looked down at the bowed head.

"Did that man back there say how he would save you?" he asked suddenly.

"No, sir."

"Who is the man you love? Has this man anything to do with your love story in any way?"

"No," answered poor Viola, too miserable to give much heed to her answers.

"Tell me the name of the man you love. You know I can find it out by asking that man back there."

That was true enough. There was no reason for concealment. But, oh, would it get into the papers? How Mr. Hardman would hate her then! And what would Walter do? Maybe he would not hear of it.

"His name must not get into the papers," she pleaded.

"His name shall not get in through me," he said, in a tone that made her have faith in him. "What is his name?"

"Walter Hardman," she answered.

He looked at her curiously.

"The son of Silas Hardman?"

"Yes, sir."

"And does the old man know?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, sir. But Walter has gone away to remain for a year. We are not to be married unless we love at the end of a year."

The detective pursed up his mouth, as if about to whistle.

"Mr. Walter is away, eh?"

"Yes, sir; in Europe. Oh, he must not know of this."

"And you say his father approved of your intended marriage?" he queried, without paying any attention to her last remark.

"He didn't approve, perhaps, but he was willing, if we continued to love. I know he would have preferred Walter to marry Miss Carroll!"

"Miss Carroll!" exclaimed the detective, with a startled look down at the bowed head.

"Yes; she who accuses me of stealing her ring."

"Did she know you were to marry Walter Hardman?" he asked.

"No, I don't suppose she did," Viola replied.

"Have you ever been sent out with laces before?" he asked.

"No, sir. Other girls have been. I only went to the lace department a few days ago. It was a promotion for me."

"Promoted, eh?" he said, in a musing way, and then went on in silence.

Viola did not note his silence, for she had only answered mechanically, and because she had felt that she might as well, since concealment was impossible.

The man walked by her side, telling her when to turn, and guarding her against being run over when they crossed the streets.

She did not see where he was leading her, and she did not care. Her thoughts wandered from Walter to her mother, and back again. They were her whole world.

Suddenly the detective recalled her to herself by saying sharply:

"Have you any money in your pocket?"

"A little. Three dollars."

"Here are twenty. I cannot afford to give you any more. I want you to go out of the city. Go into the country and hide. I think you are innocent, and there is no need for you to have your name in every paper in the city. You must escape from me. Do you understand?"

Viola stared at him.

"My mother!" she stammered.

"I will do what I can for her. But you go. Take the cars at the Grand Central, and go somewhere in the country. Or to some other city. Then write to your mother. I think you are innocent, and I intend to clear you. Go quickly now."

She seemed dazed for a moment before she could grasp the idea that he really was giving her her freedom.

Then she seized his hand and kissed it.

"I am innocent," she sobbed, "and Heaven will bless you for your goodness. Oh, thank you! thank you!"

CHAPTER XII.

SNATCHING A CHILD.

Peter Harriem looked after the detective as he followed Viola out of the store, and then glided swiftly to where his hat and coat hung, and hurriedly threw them on, muttering:

"I don't like the way that fellow looked at me and at her. I half believe he has fallen in love with her. That wondrous beauty of hers is enough to turn any fellow's head."

He came face to face with Mr. Hardman as he was putting his coat on.

"I was just looking for you," the head of the firm said. "I would like——"

"Do not stop me now," whispered Peter eagerly. "I have just set in motion the little plot of ours. I must go at once. I do not know when I shall return. Everything is so that it will go on without me here."

"Go, then. I will see that everything runs as it should."

Peter glided from the store, and the old man, with a cynical curl of his thin lips, murmured:

"A useful fellow when well controlled."

Peter, meanwhile, was making his way swiftly through the crowded store, and down the street.

The detective and Viola were not in sight, but Peter was not long in making up his mind what to do.

He ran to the nearest corner and looked up and down the street.

They were not there. The next thing was to run back to the other corner, and this he did.

He saw the pair walking down the block, and crossed over to the other side in order that he might the better follow them.

His experience in following Viola on other occasions was of use to him now, having given him a good idea of the manner in which it should be done to be successful.

Moreover, nothing could be more in keeping with his stealthy nature than this sly spying on another.

A trained detective "shadow" could not have done better than he did.

He followed them as he went, and noted how they talked together, forming his own conclusions of what their conversation must be about.

Then he saw the detective give her something, though he could not tell what it was until he saw her turn away, and leave the man who should have taken her to prison.

"He gave her money, so that she could get out of the city," said Peter, in a tone of conviction. "It was as I

thought. "He has fallen in love with her pretty face, and is assisting her to escape."

A fiendish smile crossed his lean face, as he saw the two separate.

"He little knows," he muttered, "that he is helping me more than he is her. Now she is a fugitive from justice, and she will fall into my power so much the more easily."

The detective followed Viola to the corner and saw her speeding uptown. He shook his head pityingly, murmuring:

"Poor girl! She is the victim of a conspiracy which I will ferret out. It seems quite clear, but it will not be easy to prove my belief."

He turned down the avenue, while Viola was hastening up it. Peter, with stealthy movement, yet making himself as inconspicuous as possible, was gliding after Viola.

Poor Viola! her heart was throbbing with the fear of one who has felt the clutch of the law on her arm, and who does not know when again it will be there.

Her one instinct was to get out of the city as quickly as possible; she dared not even go to her mother to explain to her what had happened, and what she intended to do.

So she sped up the avenue until she came to Forty-

second Street, where she turned toward the East Side, and kept on until she reached the depot.

There was the customary turmoil of moving crowds of passengers, some going away, and others returning to the city. The street was alive with electric cars and automobiles, and trucks, and wagons.

Viola saw nothing of it all. She was bent on getting into a train which would carry her away from the awful peril of prison.

She turned toward the depot of the Hudson River division, because it seemed the nearest, and was about to enter the first doorway, when she heard a scream of terror.

The cry came from the lips of a girl dressed as a nurse, and as Viola followed the direction in which she was looking, she saw at once the cause of the scream.

A pretty little boy, with golden curls hanging down his back, and showing by his costly dress that he was the child of wealthy parents, stood in the middle of the street, apparently paralyzed with terror.

A carriage drawn by two frightened horses was dashing down the street from the direction of Forty-third Street.

The child would be run over and killed if he were not snatched away from where he stood, and everybody knew it, but somehow each was watching for the other to do it.

"My boy! oh, my boy!" fell on the ears of Viola.

She turned, and in the flash of an eye saw a noble-looking man of middle age prostrate on the top step of the low stoop leading to the waiting room. A crutch by his side told her the story of what had happened.

He had forgotten a wounded foot, and had leaped to the rescue of his threatened child, and had fallen.

All this occupied but a second of time. It seemed as if everything here described had happened at the same moment.

The excitement which filled the atmosphere about her aroused Viola from the stupor of misery into which she had fallen, and while her mind was mechanically taking in all that her eyes had seen, she had prepared herself to act.

The infuriated horses were almost upon the little boy, whose blue eyes were fixed on them with an awful horror in them, when Viola leaped from where she stood, and snatched the child in her arms from under the very hoofs of the plunging animals.

Then something struck her, and she was whirled around and tossed toward the sidewalk, her senses reeling.

She was only conscious of clinging to the child and of giving him up to a white-haired old lady, who snatched him to her bosom with a wild cry of joy.

Then she swooned, and knew no more until she

opened her eyes and became conscious of several things all at once.

She was on a railroad train, which was moving, and the face of an old lady, which seemed dimly familiar, was looking down on her.

She gazed into the face for a moment with a blank expression in her brown eyes, then came a sudden realization of what had happened to her.

The saving of the child was nothing, but her own misery was paramount.

He was safe, while she was a prisoner fleeing from the grasp of the law.

"Where am I?" she cried, trying to rise.

"You are in good hands, my dear," was the soothing answer, as the old lady pressed her gently back. "You were injured a little on the arm, and the only thing to do seemed to bring you right into the car. We could not leave you to be cared for by strangers when you had saved our darling from a terrible death."

"We are leaving the city," murmured Viola, comprehending that that was exactly what she most wished.

"Yes, we had a stateroom in the car, so, you see, you are quite private. And we found a surgeon who attended to you at once, and said the injury was so trifling that you would not notice it in a few days."

Viola turned and looked inquiringly at her shoulder,

and saw that her sleeve had been cut away to permit an examination.

"I was with you all the time, my dear," said the lady. "And we are alone, now. My son and little Rupert are outside in the car."

"I am sure I can get up now." Viola said, in a low tone.

She felt that she must get by herself in order that she might decide what to do.

"You must not. Why should you? Are you worried about what your friends at home will think of your absence?"

Viola's eyes answered yes.

"I had thought of that," the old lady said, with a pleasant smile. "You may write a telegram here, and it can be sent from the first station. That will reassure your friends, and you may then go home with us and remain there until you are quite well. Won't that do?"

She was going away from the city, where her danger lay, and there was no reason why she should not accept the hospitality of the people for whom she had endangered her life.

"Thank you," she answered, "that will do. I do not like to be a trouble to you, but I suppose I cannot help it now."

The old lady smiled sweetly.

"That is the way to look at it. And if you only knew how grateful we are to you, you would not have any feeling of discomfort in accepting every attention we can offer. Perhaps I had better write the telegram, at your dictation. I will get a blank."

She left the room to get the telegraph blank, and Viola had a chance to consider her situation.

"I must not betray who I am," she said. "It is certain that my name will get into the papers, in spite of what that good detective can do. If I have enemies, they will do all they can to ruin me. I must telegraph to mamma, but I must not put my name to the message. I will sign it Viola. That will tell her everything."

"Now," said the old lady, returning, "what shall I say?"

Viola studied out the words for a moment, and the telegram was written at her dictation.

"Do not worry about me. I am quite safe, and will write to-night. VIOLA."

"Viola! What a pretty name," the old lady said, soothing back the brown curls that clustered around the low, white brow. "But do you not wish to say where you are going?"

"I can tell that when I write," Viola said.

"And now to whom is this to be sent?" the lady asked.

Viola started in dismay. She must tell her mother's name, after all, or the message would not reach her.

It seemed to her that it was useless to hope to escape. Somehow or other it would be sure to leak out that she was accused of theft, and there would be no asylum for her anywhere.

The kind old lady sat there waiting patiently, yet wonderingly. She could not comprehend the manifest agitation of the beautiful girl.

Viola's thoughts sped quickly. Something must be done. Her mother must know, or she would become ill worrying. Why not take the chances?

"Mrs. Kate Redmond," she said, in a low tone, and added the address.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN FRONT OF A MIRROR.

The old lady went out to give the telegram to the conductor, so that he might send it from the first station.

"She knew by the address that we live in a tenement house," Viola murmured to herself. "I could see that by the look of her face. I wonder if she will be just as kind to me now? Well, it does not matter. When I get to the end of the journey, I shall be able to go on if she does not seem to want me."

But the expression on the kind face was the same when the old lady returned, and Viola knew that she had been unjust.

"Then your name is Viola Redmond?" the lady said. "I suppose now you would like to know what my name is?"

"Yes, please," answered Viola.

"My name is Beekman; my son is Howard Beekman, and the little boy whose life you saved is my grandson, Rupert Beekman. My son is temporarily lame from an accident, and we are going up to the old family place to spend Christmas, and be quiet. You will like Clover Hill."

"I shall not trouble you for long," Viola said.

"You shall not go until your shoulder is quite well," Mrs. Beekman said. "But we are not going to think of that. I am not going to let you go until I trust. Why, I shall be lonely up there unless I have some one with me. I was going to send down to the city for one of my young friends to come up to me. I will promise you plenty of sleighing and skating, if you care for such things."

Viola thought the lady must still be under a misapprehension concerning her. She said in a quiet, sad tone:

"I am only a working girl, Mrs. Beekman. I thought you knew that from the address I gave you."

Mrs. Beekman smiled sweetly, and stroked the round cheek.

"Of course I guessed it, my dear. Did it make any difference to you that Rupert was rich when you saved him?"

"No; I only saw that he was in danger," Viola answered.

"And do you think it makes any difference to us that you are poor? The only difference it makes is that it gives me a chance I would not have had if you had been rich."

Viola looked at her, but did not say anything.

"If you have to work for a living," said the old lady, "does it make any difference to you what you do?"

"Not much," Viola answered, her brown eyes fixed on the face she was learning to like.

"Then you must remain with me as my companion. I have been looking for some one to take the place for a long time, and I think you have been sent to me. Will you stay with me?"

"Oh, I shall be so glad!" Viola cried eagerly. "I will stay as long as you will keep me, and I will try so hard to please you. Only perhaps I shall not know what to do."

Mrs. Beekman laughed and patted her cheek.

"I am not afraid of that," she said. "The duties are not difficult to master. You are sure your mother will not mind?"

Viola thought of the sweet-faced invalid all alone in the tenement house, and the tears started to her eyes. What a cruel fate it was that divided them!

"She will do the best she can," she answered, and then burst out with a choking sob: "Oh, what shall I do?"

"Something is troubling you," said Mrs. Beekman kindly. "Is it anything I can help you about?"

Viola shook her head. She did not dare tell even so kind a person as this her true story.

She knew that the evidence was all against her, and

she felt that no one who knew what had happened would trust her.

"Well, never mind," said Mrs. Beekman kindly; "you have placed us under a great obligation, and you may be sure we shall always be glad to help you as best we can."

Nothing more was said on the subject, and after a little while Viola was permitted to sit up. And after her coat had been put on, Mr. Beekman and little Rupert were asked to come into the stateroom.

The nurse was not there, and Viola learned that she had been sent home, since it was entirely owing to her carelessness that the accident had happened.

Mr. Beekman was visibly interested in the beautiful girl who had saved his child, and did all he could to aid his mother in putting her at her ease.

But, probably, nothing he or his mother could have done would have put her as much at her ease as little Rupert's winsome prattling did.

He seemed to take to Viola at once, and snuggled up to her in the way so sweet in children, and presently she found herself talking to him and telling him stories, as if the older people had not been there.

Mrs. Beekman smiled at her son, and exchanged meaning glances with him.

It was plain that neither of them was sorry that Viola was going home with them.

And when at last the station where they were to get off was reached, it seemed to Viola almost as if she were going to a place that might be a shelter and a home during the terrible period of suspense before the kind detective could clear her name from the stain upon it.

A motor car was waiting at the station, and it was not long before they were being whirled up the gentle slope that led from the station to the hills beyond.

The sky was overcast with dull, leaden clouds, and there was that peculiar feeling in the air that betokened a coming snowstorm.

And indeed they had not yet reached the mansion amid the trees when the great flakes began to come floating slowly down.

Rupert cried out with glee at the prospect of sleighing, and began to chatter to Viola about the fun they would have together.

And when the house was reached and the hall door thrown open to admit them, they were greeted by the sight of a great fire of blazing logs in the capacious chimney of the wide hall.

It was like a new world to Viola, and she felt that if she could only rid herself of the awful fear of discovery she could be very happy there.

Instinctively she began to make herself useful by removing Rupert's outer garments, but was stopped by

Mrs. Beekman, who told her that Rupert would be taken care of by his old friend, Mrs. Daly, the housekeeper.

So Viola surrendered the child to the comfortable-looking woman, and followed Mrs. Beekman up to her room.

"Do you feel well enough to go down to dinner with us?" the old lady inquired, when they stood alone in the cheery apartment.

"I feel quite well, excepting for a sore feeling in the shoulder," Viola replied. "But I don't see how I can go down in the dress I have on."

She blushed as she spoke, thinking of the cut sleeve, which exposed her snowy shoulder. Mrs. Beekman smiled pleasantly.

"That can be fixed easily enough," she said. "In fact, I shall be very much surprised if Mrs. Daly has not already provided for that. The truth is, that when I telegraphed for you, I also telegraphed up here, telling the housekeeper to lay out some clothes which belonged to a dear granddaughter of mine, now dead. Come with me."

She led Viola to an adjoining room, which had been prepared for the coming of a guest, and there Viola saw by the garments thrown on the bed that Mrs. Daly must have received the telegram.

"I think they will fit you, dear," said Mrs. Beekman. "Anyhow, I will leave you while you try them on."

"Won't you let me help you first?" Viola asked anxiously, eager to begin her duties.

"There will be time enough for anything of that sort later on, my dear. But, of course, you understand I want you for a companion, and not for a maid. You may help me just as a young person would an older one, but not in any other way."

Perhaps there was a kindly design on the part of the old lady in leaving Viola alone for the first few minutes of her arrival in the house.

Certainly the young girl was glad of the opportunity to sink into a chair, and have her thoughts to herself. It was almost a necessity that she should be able to look about her and adjust her thoughts to her new conditions.

What strange happenings there had been in her life! It was as if some unseen hand had been guiding her steps.

The more she thought over the finding of the ring in her pocket, the more certain it was in her mind that she was in fact the victim of a dreadful conspiracy, though she was not shrewd enough in guessing to arrive at the truth as the detective had done.

How terrible the future had looked at the moment

when she left the store of Hardman & Son, accused of theft, and on her way to a felon's cell!

But how providentially the rest had happened! The detective had been won to believe her innocent, and had told her to go free.

But even then she must have had a terrible time but for the accident, which in the strangest way had ended in her being where she was.

It calmed her mind to be able to go over the events of the day, and it seemed to her now that she could bear her troubles with equanimity.

She would send what money she had to her mother, and all that she should earn in the future should go to her, too.

In the meanwhile, Walter should be written to, and he would surely advise her what to do.

In her heart she had no doubt that he would return to her at all hazards, and she knew that she had not the strength to bid him remain where he was.

She settled everything before she began to think of dressing, and the improvement in her spirits consequent on doing so was plainly apparent.

The world looked brighter, the future more hopeful, and when she set about removing her own clothes to don those which had been laid out for her, she found herself humming a tune.

The room she was in was far daintier than any she ever had occupied.

It was furnished not only with luxury, but with such exquisite taste that it seemed like a fairy bower.

The great mullioned window looked down upon a lawn fast whitening under the fall of snow, and in the distance stretched the gray woods, with the lordly Hudson shimmering in the dull afternoon like a great, smooth lake.

The clothes fitted her as if they had been made for no one else, but when they were on, and she saw how rich and elegant they were, she was dismayed.

She had never worn such garments in her life before, though she had seen such in the store, and could make a reasonable guess at their cost.

There was a cheval glass in the room, and she stood in front of it so that she could see herself.

"I should like to wear such clothes," she said to herself. "But as long as they are not mine, I would rather have my shabby ones on."

"But they are yours, my dear," said the soft voice of Mrs. Beekman, who had suddenly entered the room. "They fit you better than they would any one else, and yours they are to be. There are ever so many more, so you see you have a complete outfit. Now, don't attempt to tell me you don't wish them, for my mind is made up, and I am mistress here."

"But I do not deserve so much kindness," said Viola.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Beekman. "Here is a little pin to fasten at your throat. There! now you look good enough for anything."

"Was the young lady Mr. Beekman's daughter?" asked Viola, shy of appearing before him if the sight of the clothes was likely to bring up unhappy recollections.

"Oh, dear, no! Howard is only thirty-five. Rupert is his only child. The boy's mother died when he was born, and I have always had the care of him. Come. Dear me! how prettily your hair is done up!"

She did not say that she had never seen such a charming little beauty in all her life before, but it was what she thought, and it was what Howard Beekman thought, too, when Viola glided into the parlor, and blushed as he greeted her.

CHAPTER XIV.

JUST AS AN OLD MAN.

Two weeks passed away in the delightful home of the Beekmans, and Viola lacked but one thing of perfect happiness.

She had written to her mother, explaining everything, and inclosing the money she had received from the detective, and, in return, she had received a letter telling her to be of good cheer, and remain where she was.

"I shall get along nicely," the letter had said. "I am sure Walter will be home the moment he hears from you. Until then remain where you are."

Now, if she could but get a word from Walter, she would be completely happy. But it was not yet time to receive an answer to the one she had written him about the occurrence, so there was nothing to do but have patience.

Her new friends were as good to her as if she had been of their own blood, and she had not been long in discovering that the old lady's offer to make her her companion was nothing more than a device to keep her at the mansion.

The snow had come, and the lake near the house had

frozen over; so she went out sleighing with Mr. Beekman and Rupert, and one day was presented with a beautiful new pair of skates, so that she and Rupert's father might go skating together.

It never once occurred to her that Mr. Beekman was more than courteous to her; that his attentions were as fervent and marked as those of the one who sues for favor.

She often caught his eyes fixed on her face, but when she turned blushing away, it was with no sort of consciousness that he was telling himself that she was the most beautiful creature he had ever looked upon.

To her, he was simply an old man. Old to her, anyhow, and no more likely to think of loving her, than she of loving him.

But if she did not see it, his mother did; and one day she called him to her as she sat in her favorite seat in the bay window, looking out on the lawn where Viola, with sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks, was playing in the snow with Rupert.

"Howard," said his mother, "she is a very pretty girl, is she not?"

"The most beautiful I ever saw," he answered.

"I have noticed that you look at her a great deal," she said. "Does it mean anything more than admiration, Howard?"

He looked over her head, and at the pretty sight out on the lawn before he made any response. Then he said slowly:

"Yes, it means more than admiration. I know that she looks upon me as an old man; but I love her, mother, with the fervor of a young heart, and if she will have me, I will make her my wife."

"You know nothing of her past," she said.

"It is enough to know the present of such a nature as hers. It is as transparent and pure as Heaven-made crystals."

"She may love another," she said again.

"I know it, but I hope not. She is very young to have thought much of such a thing as lovers, and I hope she is heart free. Do you object, mother?"

"You know I do not. She is a lovely girl, as good as she is beautiful, and words could go no further. Win her if you can; but prepare yourself for a disappointment, my boy."

"I will, mother. But do you think I would be unwise to speak to her now of my love? Might it not be well for me if I could bring her to think of me as a lover, and not only as a man who is older than she, and out of her life?"

"Perhaps; but an abrupt confession such as that might startle her. I do not know how to advise you."

"I will let opportunity decide," he said. "How beau-

tiful she is! That man will be fortunate who wins her for his wife."

The object of his admiration, meanwhile, was thinking of nothing so little as winning the love of any man.

If love was constantly in her thoughts, it was only because all her soul was filled with longing to see again the dear face of Walter.

She thought of him constantly, but she did not let her longing make her unhappy.

Unconscious now of being seen by the two who watched her from the curtained window, she gave herself up to the task of pleasing little Rupert, until he declared he was too cold to play out of doors any longer.

Then she caught up her skates, which she had thrown on a bench while she frolicked with him, and started down toward the lake.

It was a picturesque spot, and Viola went there to skate dreamily about, while her heart was filled with sweet thoughts of the absent lover.

She had almost forgotten her troubles in the happy belief that no one would give much thought to her now that she had disappeared from the city.

They saw her take up her skates and disappear in the woods by the path that led to the lake.

"I will go skate with her," Howard Beekman said.

He hastened away to get his skates, and his mother,

looking out of the window, saw him disappear by the same path which Viola had taken.

"May he win her!" she murmured.

The same hope was in his heart as he walked slowly along the path. He would not go too quickly, lest she might take alarm at being followed so closely.

So he sauntered through the wood, wondering as he drew nearer to the lake that he did not see her form flitting about over the ice.

Still he was not sure that he could see her so far away, though it seemed to him that he had been able to do so on previous occasions.

But as he drew nearer to the lake he was sure that she could not be there, and he fancied she must have wandered on to a rock from which there was a magnificent view of the valley of the Hudson.

He hesitated for a while, trying to make up his mind whether to follow her or not, but presently put his hesitation aside and went on to the lake, and looked for her footprints.

They were easily found and unmistakable, because they were so small. He looked at them fondly for a moment, and then followed where they led him.

It was not toward the rock, but toward the road that they went, and with a start of dismay Howard Beekman realized that they were side by side with the footprints of a man.

Should he follow or not? Who was the man? Was he a stranger? Might it be one of the servants, who, perhaps, had something he wished to show her?

He could not reason out his proper course, but followed because he could not rest without knowing.

Side by side the footprints went until the road was reached; there they stopped. Beads of perspiration stood out on the forehead of Howard Beekman.

"There was a sleigh waiting there," he muttered hoarsely, "and she must have gone in the sleigh! What does it mean?"

CHAPTER XV.

"SHE WILL DO MY WORK."

There was no compunction or remorse in the heart of Eunice Carroll after she had entered on the cruel plot to destroy the reputation of her hated rival.

She was hard by nature, and it was little to her to sweep a poor girl like Viola from her path.

So she waited with a fierce impatience to hear some word as to the result of the plot. It did not come until the evening.

Then Stella, her maid, came to her to say that the detective she had sent for earlier in the day had come, and was waiting in the reception room.

"Did he say anything?" she demanded eagerly.

"Nothing, miss, except to ask for you. I hope he has found the ring."

"And I hope he has the thief in prison!" was the hissing answer.

Stella shrugged her shoulders as she watched her mistress sweep out of the room.

"How Miss Eunice hates the little shop girl," she murmured. "I wonder why?"

Eunice Carroll burst into the reception room, where the keen-eyed detective awaited her coming.

"Well," she said eagerly, making no effort to conceal her venom, "have you arrested the girl?"

"Is this your ring?" he asked coldly.

She snatched the ring from him and looked at it carefully.

"Yes, it is mine. Did you find it on her? Did you arrest her?"

"I arrested her," he answered.

"That is good. You shall be rewarded. Those impudent creatures! They pretend to be honest with the most brazen impudence, but they will steal anything."

"I do not understand," he said, a look of dislike passing over his face like a shadow.

"Those salesgirls," she said, stamping her little foot impatiently. "I mean them. That girl was so indignant because I told her not to go too near the dressing table, and then she stole the ring, after all. So she is in prison, and the newspapers to-morrow will print the story of her crime."

"No, she is not in prison," he said calmly. "She escaped."

"Escaped!" cried Eunice angrily. "And not caught again?"

"Not caught yet," he replied.

"Escaped from you?" she demanded, her black eyes flaming suddenly on his face.

"Escaped from me," he answered impassively.

"A nice detective, you!" she sneered. "But it is not possible. It is a trick of some sort! The girl could not escape from you. She bought her freedom with her beauty. What is it in her face that makes men care for her? I will inform against you at the office. You let her go!"

"Is this your ring?" he asked, in his cold, unmoved way.

She glared at him with the furious passion of a wild animal.

"It is mine," she replied. "Has anything been done to recapture the girl?"

"The usual steps have been taken," he replied. "Good evening."

He bowed and left the room. She watched him, and listened until she heard the outer door slam. Then she ground her small white teeth together, and stamped upon the floor with her little foot.

"It is a trick, a trick," she muttered angrily. "But what does it matter? The girl is already smirched with the crime. If she has run away it is an admission of guilt. It was her beauty, I suppose. How could she run away from him? I will go see that sneaking wretch who proposed the plot."

Half an hour later her carriage stood in front of the store of Hardman & Son, and she was inside asking for Peter Harriem.

She was informed that he had gone out earlier in the day, and had not yet returned. Nor did any one know when he would return.

"Perhaps Mr. Hardman will know," she said, in her imperious way. "Where is Mr. Hardman?"

"Upstairs, in his private office."

"Tell him that Miss Eunice Carroll wishes to see him."

The name was a charm. It was known in the store that she was one of the best customers, and also it was whispered that she and Walter were to be married.

The clerk hastened away, and presently came back with most humble apologies, to say that Mr. Hardman begged her to come up to his office.

So she went up there, and swept proudly into the room where many a heart had grown cold with fear of the hard man who sat there.

"Miss Eunice!" he exclaimed cordially. "What lucky stroke of fortune is it that brings you here? Pray be seated."

"No, I came to see Mr. Harriem about a small matter of business. No one else will do. I only want you to tell me where he is, or when he will return. I am very anxious to see him."

"Peter has left the city, I believe. I received a note from him this afternoon, saying he would not be back

this evening. If you wish, I will tell him that you desire to see him. He will call the moment he returns."

"You do not know where he has gone?" she queried.

"I have not the least idea, Miss Eunice. You see, he is my confidential man, and I trust him so far that it is not essential that he should tell me just what he does with his time. Shall I tell him that you wish to see him?"

"If you will be so kind. Good night!"

She went away filled with rage, yet hoping that somehow the absence of her partner in crime meant something in relation to the affair at hand.

That night she was forced to attend a magnificent ball, at which she was the leading beauty.

She retired from the ball early, however, and consumed the remaining hours of the night in a vain effort to sleep.

It was not until morning came that she fell into a troubled slumber, in which her dreams were of the girl she was striving to ruin, and who seemed always to be mocking her with triumphant smiles.

Stella thought she had never known her never-pleasant mistress quite so difficult to get along with.

"If Mr. Harriem calls," said Eunice, when she dismissed her maid at last, "show him up here. Don't wait to announce him."

So at about ten o'clock, the cringing, obsequious

Peter was ushered into the sumptuous boudoir of the beauty.

He was still bowing and cringing when the door closed in response to an imperious gesture from Eunice to Stella.

"Come nearer and whisper," she said to him fiercely. "I do not know but that girl is at the keyhole. The girl has escaped. Did you know it?"

"I followed her and saw the detective give her money and let her go free. They did not know I was watching. They do not know that I am as cunning as the best of them."

"Why did you not have her stopped? I wished her to go to prison and be disgraced."

"But I am not so anxious," he said, with a sort of leer, which seemed to indicate that for all his cringing he was not one to be driven. "You know I am to marry her."

"Did you follow her after she left the detective," asked Eunice.

"Yes. That is why I was out of town. I followed her."

"Where is she?" Eunice demanded.

Peter hesitated for a moment, then answered:

"Do you know anybody by the name of Beekman?"

"I know Howard Beekman. He belongs to our set."

"Well, Viola saved his little boy——"

"Rupert?"

"That is the name. Viola saved his life, and the Beekmans have taken her with them to their home. No doubt they mean to keep her with them."

"Will you permit it? She might better be here in the store."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"What can I do? Now that they are her friends, don't you see that they will be able to help her? It is not as if she were friendless. Besides, you seem to forget the detective."

"What about him?" demanded Eunice quickly.

"Why, don't you see that he suspects somebody or he would not have let her go away. He would not have dared. He is pretty sure that we will not push the matter."

"And you mean," cried Eunice, "that you will let the matter drop just where it is? Why, she is better off than before. And she is sure to write to Walter, telling him what has happened."

Peter turned pale. Simple as the thing was, he had not thought of it.

His subtle brain worked quickly. Suppose she did. The result would be to bring Walter home. That would take at least a month.

In the meantime he should be able to carry out his plans.

Walter might suspect him, but he would know by Viola's letter that Eunice was the chief factor in the plot against her.

"You are right," he said. "Of course you are right. Why did I not think of it? Walter will be home in a month, and she will explain everything to him."

"They must not meet," hissed Eunice. "Do you think I have begun only to turn back at the first obstacle? Have you a plan that will do?"

"I had a plan, but it is useless," he said gloomily.

"Tell me the plan," she said.

"What is the use? She must have written to him, and he is sure to come home at once. Yes, I had what was a beautiful plan, but it is worthless now. I will give it up."

"Tell me what it was," she said.

"If I tell you I warn you that I will not put it in practice," he said.

"Just as you please about that," she replied. "Tell me the plan."

"Well," he said, "it is certain from the conduct of the detective that it will be idle to think of pressing the charge of the theft against her."

"I suppose so. Well?"

"But I thought I could make her believe she was in prison, and that the only way of escape was by marrying me."

"How could you do that?" she asked.

"I was going to find some person who would consent to play the parts of judge and officers. I would give her a mock trial and convict her. I would have sentenced her to prison, and would have found a cell for her. Then I would have gone to her, and I do not doubt she would have married me to escape. Of course, once married to me, Walter would be bound to believe her faithless to him."

"And you give up this plan now?" she asked slowly, as if her thoughts were busy.

"Yes, I give it up now," he answered.

"Well," she said coldly, "if you have given it up, I suppose I might as well do so. Good day!"

He bowed and cringed as he had done on entering, and was gone.

"The cur!" she snapped, when he was gone. "I am well rid of such a coward. Let him go! I will prosecute my plan alone."

"Ha, ha!" Peter chuckled, as he glided down the steps to the sidewalk, "she will do my work for me, and I shall reap the profit. It is the safest way. If she did not hate so bitterly, this could not have been. I am very fortunate."

CHAPTER XVI.

A DETECTIVE AGENCY.

It chanced that this was Eunice's day to receive at home. She dressed in her most becoming gown.

There was one caller she could always depend upon. He was a young lawyer, who was making a specialty of the criminal practice, and who was bent on capturing a rich wife as a fair means of making a good start.

This was Henry Baldwin, one of her most assiduous suitors, whom she alternately snubbed and encouraged.

He came, as she had supposed he would, and began immediately to make himself agreeable to Eunice.

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin," she said earnestly, "we have been talking about detectives. You must know all about them."

It was an interesting subject, and the callers asked him a great many questions. Eunice asked one only once in a while.

Nevertheless, when he was gone she made some notes on a piece of paper, and her black eyes were all aglow with a purpose.

The next morning she went out without the carriage, which was an event, for she disliked to walk on the streets.

"I wonder where she is going?" mused Stella. "She has her last year's cloak on—a garment that should have come to me by this time. I wonder where she is going?"

She wondered, but she did not think of trying to find out. She was a luxury-loving young woman, and took as little trouble as possible.

Had she followed her mistress, however, she would have seen her go to a part of the city strange, indeed, for her.

She rode in a Third Avenue street car, too, and reached the Bowery in that way. She studied the street names on the lamp-posts, too, and finally stopped the car and alighted from it.

It was a new experience for the haughty beauty to be in that rude part of the city, and she was angry at being jostled by rough men.

But she did not waver in her purpose, and at last turned in at a narrow, dirty hallway, after studying the signs tacked up at the door.

The sign ~~that~~ held her attention longest was one reading:

"Detective Agency. Business of a confidential character transacted promptly and faithfully."

She climbed the rickety stairs to the office of this firm, which Henry Baldwin had said the day before was one of the most unscrupulous agencies in the city.

There were three men in the office, and their heels came down from their elevation on the desk with a reluctance that showed they paid but scant attention to the requirements of good society.

"I wish to see the manager of this agency!" Eunice said, with a slight shudder at the expressions on the three faces.

"I am the manager," said one, whose pale-blue eyes looked curiously at her out of a pallid, thin face.

"I have some business with you," she said. "I wish to see you alone. What is your name?"

"Sam Purdy. Boys, will you leave us alone?"

The two men winked at him, and stared at her, as they rose from their chairs, and left the room.

"Now, madam," Purdy said, motioning to a chair, "what is it? Something in the divorce line?"

"No," she said, "this has nothing to do with a divorce. But before we have any talk, let us understand each other."

"Nothing would suit me better," he replied.

"I have heard of you from a person who knows you thoroughly," she said to him.

"I hope you had a good report," he answered, with indescribable irony.

"It was good for my purpose. He said you were the most unscrupulous man in New York, and that you would do anything for money."

"And suppose I admit what your friend so flatteringly says of me?" he queried calmly.

"I do not ask you to admit or deny," she replied. "All I wish is that you will understand that any pretense of having scruples will not impose upon me."

"Very well," he said, "we will have that understood; but, really, I do not intend to make any such claim for myself. All I ask is that you will explain your business. If it is something I can do, and you can pay for it, that is all that is necessary to know. What is your business?"

"Let me first assure you that I am able and willing to pay for the service I shall ask of you."

"Very well. What is the service?"

"There is a girl who is in my way," she began.

He interrupted her to say in his calm, even tones:

"Of course, you understand that murder is quite out of my line?"

"I shall ask nothing of the sort of you. The girl is in my way, and I wish her frightened off."

"Is she rich or poor?"

"Poor, and a fugitive from justice. She was accused of stealing a diamond ring, which was found on her person. She was arrested and escaped on the way to prison. I know where she is, and want her kidnaped. Will you do it?"

"What is to be done with her after that?" he asked.

"I want her to be made to believe that she has simply been arrested. Then a mock trial is to be held, and she is to be sentenced to prison; a cell must be found to put her in, and after that I will take care of her."

Purdy mused a few minutes, and finally said:

"The thing is not so difficult, but it is dangerous. Has she no friends at all?"

"The only friends she has are the people she is now living with, and they have known her but a few days. She saved the life of a little boy, and is now living with his father and grandmother in the country."

"You say you are willing to pay well for this?" he asked.

"You may name your own price for doing it successfully," she answered.

"I will undertake it," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHUTTING THE DOOR.

The thing that had happened to Viola was this:

She had gone with a merry heart from the game in the snow to the lake, intending to skate for a while before entering the house to change her clothes for dinner.

Christmas was almost at hand, and she had been working on some little gifts for her kind friends. She wished to have a little time alone so that she might put some finishing touches to the presents.

She was facing the lake and getting ready to seat herself on a bench so that she might put on her skates, when she was startled by a voice saying in a sharp whisper:

"Miss Redmond! Do not be alarmed. I come from your friend, the detective, who gave you your freedom when you were falsely accused of theft."

She turned with beating heart, alarmed in spite of his reassuring words, and faced a stranger, whose face was none too prepossessing.

"What do you want?" she said, pressing her little hand against her throbbing bosom.

"I only want to tell you that your friend is waiting

at the roadside. He has something important to tell you. But you must come quickly," and the man glanced uneasily toward the house.

"How can I be sure?" she began to say, when he interrupted impatiently:

"Well, I can't stay here, miss. If you don't believe me, I must go. The only thing I will say is that he has something to say about a Mr. Walter Hardman, who is supposed to be in Europe, but who isn't."

"Walter!" she cried. "Oh, can it be that he——"

"I don't say he is waiting for you," the man interrupted. "I guess if he was around here you'd know it. But it's something about him. Well, I can't wait. I said you wouldn't come with me."

"Yes, I will, I will," she said nervously. "I will go at once."

She started toward the road, and the man took his place by her side, walking very quickly, so that it was all she could do to keep pace with him.

"Can you tell me nothing of Wal—— Mr. Hardman?" she asked.

"Don't worry about him, miss. I can tell you he is all right. You will see him soon enough, too. Could you walk a little faster? I wouldn't like to be seen by anybody from the house."

She quickened her pace almost to a run, and presently was where she could see the road. There was a

sleigh there, with a man sitting in it, all wrapped to the eyes in mufflers.

The sleigh was a large two-seated affair, and was drawn by two powerful bay horses.

All this she noticed mechanically. She wondered if the man in the sleigh was the detective.

She turned to ask such a question of her companion, when suddenly, and with the celerity of lightning, a heavy shawl was thrown over her head, and she was lifted in a powerful pair of arms and carried to the sleigh.

She fought fiercely for her freedom; but in the folds of the shawl were the fumes of a drug, and in a very little while her struggles ceased, and she became unconscious.

And after that she did not know what happened to her; but, as a matter of fact, she was put quickly into the bottom of the sleigh and covered with robes, so that no one could know that she was there.

The driver, meanwhile, had roused himself suddenly, and had put the whip to the horses almost while the men were getting in.

Everything had passed with the utmost quickness, so that the sleigh was far out of sight when Howard Beekman reached the place where it had stood.

It sped on and on, the horses dripping with lather,

but the driver plying his whip at the least sign of slackening their pace.

The man who had decoyed Viola, and the one who had thrown the shawl over her head conversed in whispers as they went.

"And it was a good job well done," said the decoy, who, in fact, was no other than Purdy himself.

"And a good job well over when it is over," said the other. "I always hate these kidnaping jobs. However, we have a safe place to put her in. The Old Boy himself would not find her there."

"The greater the risk, the greater the pay," said Purdy. "Did you notice what a beauty she is?"

"I should say so. What a lonely road! I hope Tom knows the way. It is growing dark already in these woods."

"Don't worry about him," said Purdy, "he knows the way. I hope she won't rouse up before we get her there."

It was pitch dark before the horses stopped, and it had long been a wonder to those in the back seat how the driver could find his way, but Purdy had plenty of faith, for he kept reassuring his companion all the time.

"Here we are," said Purdy, in a low tone. "Get out and take her up. I will go ahead and show you the way. I can see the house now."

"It's snowing," said the other, as he took Viola in his arms.

"Luck is with us. Our tracks will be so covered that the best detective on the force couldn't find them. Come along. How dark it is. If it wasn't for the snow I couldn't see a step. All right, Tom, you may go now."

He kicked the snow off his feet on the heavy wooden railing of the porch as he spoke, and a moment later fitted a key in the lock of the door, and led the other into a dark, but comfortably warm house.

"Take her right downstairs into the cell we fixed for her," Purdy said. "She might as well wake up in it. I suppose you haven't tried to please the black-eyed tiger cat by giving an overdose, have you?"

"No, I didn't do it, but I was half tempted to. If I'd been dead sure you wouldn't cut up rough, I believe I would have done it."

The man carrying Viola laughed as he went down the stairs, made light now by Purdy's lighting a lamp in the hall.

"Be sure to give her the antidote, Steve," said Purdy. "And be sure to play the jailer in character. You ought to know what the correct thing is."

"Yes," laughed Steve, "I've made his acquaintance often enough."

He took Viola to a room which had been fitted up in

exact resemblance of a prison cell. It might have deceived an old inmate of prisons.

He deposited her on the little iron bedstead and lit the lamp which gave light in the cell, but could not be reached by the prisoner.

Then he took from his pocket a box, from which he took some powder, which he held under the nostrils of the insensible girl.

She inhaled the powder by degrees, and presently began to move her limbs.

The instant she did so he stepped outside the door and threw off his outer garments, removing every trace of having just been out in the cold.

Viola shuddered, moaned, and presently started up like one awakening from a nightmare.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Where am I?"

"You are in prison on the charge of having stolen a diamond ring from the room of Miss Eunice Carroll," said the pretended jailer harshly. "Come! I have been waiting long enough for you to wake up. Do you want any supper? I want to close up and go to bed. All the other prisoners have had their supper long ago. If I wasn't so tender-hearted, I'd have let you go without."

Viola listened in terror.

Was it possible that she was at last the inmate of a

prison? Her heart sank. She shook her head and sobbed:

"I cannot eat. Oh, sir! shall I have to remain here long?"

"Until your trial, and, then, if you are convicted, you will probably be sent to Sing Sing for five or ten years. Well, I must go."

He shut the door with a clang, and she could hear the key turn and the bolts shoot across the door.

She sank on her knees and sobbed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S LIFE FORESHADOWED.

If Mr. Howard Beekman had had something of the detective spirit in his nature, he no doubt would have examined the footprints in the snow with a care and a purpose which would have resulted in the immediate discovery of some of the facts connected with the abduction of Viola.

As it was, he only returned home in a dejected frame of mind, feeling sure that his beautiful guest had had a clandestine meeting with some man whom he did not doubt she loved.

He avoided his mother for a while; but as the minutes slipped by and over an hour had passed without the return of Viola, he became at once uneasy and indignant, saying to himself :

"It is not right in Viola to do this. Respect for my mother should have restrained her."

He started angrily for his mother's room, but decided first to go out once more to see if perhaps Viola had returned and was skating.

He, therefore, hastened out to the lake, but of course saw no sign of her, and was obliged to return to the house with no better knowledge than he had had before.

His mother had seen him go out this time and return alone, and called to him from her room to come to her.

She saw by his face and agitated manner that something was wrong, and she exclaimed at once:

"Howard! what is the matter?"

"Viola," he answered, his voice broken, for it was a terrible blow to him that the young girl he had learned to love should have acted so.

"Viola! What of her? I saw you go out just now as if you had not been with her, and then return at once with something in your manner that filled me with fear. What has happened, Howard?"

"Sit down, mother," he said, trying to calm himself. "It is nothing, only that I have been disappointed."

"What do you mean by disappointed?" she demanded quickly. "Has she refused you? Or is it something else?"

"She has not refused me, mother," he replied. "I almost wish it was that. She has gone for a sleigh ride with some man whom she met near the lake."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mrs. Beekman, with positive assurance.

"But the proof of it is plain," he said. "There are footprints in the snow—hers by the side of his all the way to the roadside, where the sleigh had been waiting."

"There is some explanation of this which will vindi-

cate her, Howard, even if what you tell me is all true. Tell me everything."

Howard Beekman told his mother everything as he had observed it, and she listened with a keener brain than his.

"How long ago was it?" she demanded, glancing at the clock.

"There is something peculiar in this," she said. "Give me my hat and cloak and arctics. We will go out together and see if anything will be revealed to us together."

With a quickness that showed how much in earnest the old lady was, she was ready for the trip, and presently they were both out by the lake, examining the footprints.

"We must learn what we can at once," she said, looking nervously up at the sky. "It is going to snow again, and the tracks will be covered up."

It was surprising to see with what patience and skill the old lady looked over the ground, making her son, however, feel as if she were only wasting time there.

But presently she cried out, as she pointed to some tracks which had completely escaped his notice:

"Do you see those footprints? The man, whoever he was, waited for her behind a tree, and did not let his presence be known until she was ready to put on her skates."

"I don't see how you can tell that," her son said.

"Ah, my boy!" the old lady said, with a sweet smile, "I often think women have faculties which are denied most men. Why, look! Her footmarks show that she came here and faced the lake without having a thought of anybody being here. Can you not see that?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Then do you not see that she turned hurriedly, as if he had spoken to her and had startled her?"

"I shall begin to think you were born a detective," he said wonderingly.

"My son," she said, "no one ever knows with what faculties a woman is born. It is only a man who can choose; a woman's life is laid out for her by others. But never mind that. Do you see how the man stood off there and talked until he had satisfied Viola? Do you not see how he has made quite a hollow in the snow where he stood and shifted his feet?"

"Mother, it is wonderful!" Howard cried. "Go on. I beg of you!"

"I can make no more out here. Let us follow the footsteps."

Howard supported his mother as they went as quickly along in the track of the footprints as she was able.

When they came near the road, she suddenly stopped and pointed down.

"There are the footprints of another man. And, look, Howard! can you see her footprints any more? It is lost to me. And see! That other man was hidden behind a tree. Howard! there has been treachery toward our little Viola. Oh! how could you have failed to see this when you were here?"

"Would that I had!" he cried fiercely. "Oh, if this be so, I will pursue and punish the scoundrels. But what could be the motive?"

"I do not know. What does that matter? Oh, Howard, get out the sleigh and go in pursuit. Take help, for there were three men."

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"Because you can see by the way the snow was pawed up that the horses were restive, and would not have stood without a man in the sleigh to hold the reins. And we know that there were two men out here. They must have picked her up and put her in the sleigh."

"I will come here and try to follow the sleigh," he said; "though I do not expect to be able to do much. It will be hard to distinguish its tracks in the road."

"True, but you can inquire of everybody you meet about a two-seated sleigh with three men and a young lady in it; it is the only thing you can do, and will be better than sitting at home waiting in idleness."

"Yes," he returned fiercely, "and I may get on their

track. Let us go home, and I will give the order at once."

Within twenty minutes the horses had been put to the sleigh, and Howard, armed with a pair of revolvers, and accompanied by the most courageous of the men about the place, was following as best they could in pursuit of the abductors of Viola.

But it was a hopeless task; for even if there had been a track which anybody could have followed, the snow came on at last, and effectually covered every trace.

They asked questions of whomever they met, but gained no information whatever, and at last were obliged reluctantly to turn back toward home.

There was a vague hope in the mind of Howard Beekman that he would see the bright, beautiful face of Viola when he reached the house; but the hope was shattered the moment he looked into his mother's face.

"It was useless," he said. "We could hear nothing of her, and the snow obliterated all tracks in the road. What shall we do now? We must do something, for we cannot leave her to her fate. We are responsible for her."

"I have thought it all out while you were gone," his mother answered soberly. "You must go to the city and see her mother. It will be a shock to her, but it is the only way. She will be able to give us the clew to the outrage, perhaps."

"You are right," Howard said, looking at his watch. "I can catch the six-o'clock express to the city. I will go upstairs and get ready at once."

When he came down his mother had the address of Mrs. Redmond, which she put into his hand.

"Remember that she is ill," she said to him, "and do not forget that she is poor."

"Why do you say that, mother?" he asked reproachfully. "Are you afraid that I shall care less for Viola because of the place I find her mother in?"

"It would have been natural if you had been affected, Howard," she answered.

"Nothing can affect my love for her," he said. "I love her so madly that I would have her at any cost. I did not know until now how much I love her, mother."

CHAPTER XIX.

"I LOVE YOUR DAUGHTER."

Howard Beekman was an older man than Walter, and had led a fashionable life far more years, so that it was not so easy for him to reconcile himself to the thought of Viola's mother living in the poor, shabby tenement in front of which he found himself on the night he left home.

Nevertheless, he was too much in earnest in his passion for Viola to think of hesitating for a moment.

The aristocratic Howard Beekman inquired his way to Mrs. Redmond's apartment of a boy, and then toiled up the long and rickety flights of stairs.

He stopped for a moment at the door of Mrs. Redmond's room, to collect himself for the ordeal of looking upon the woman who was the mother of the girl he loved.

But when, in response to his knock, he heard the sweet, refined voice bid him come in, his apprehensions vanished, and he was certain that he was to enter the presence of a lady.

He opened the door with a respectful air of courtesy, and was charmed to see the face of the invalid.

It was a great deal to him to be sure that she was not

coarse and vulgar; and his immediate thought was that she had seen better days.

"Good evening, Mrs. Redmond!" he said courteously.

"Good evening, sir!" she responded, gazing at him with an air of surprise and wonder.

"My name," he said, anxious to relieve any feeling of doubt she might have concerning him, "is Beekman. It was my child your daughter saved from a cruel death."

The widow's face lighted up with pleased expectation, and she looked at him more earnestly than before; but even as she looked, her mother's eye detected the uneasiness and concern depicted on his face, and she cried out:

"Is anything wrong? Has anything happened? Tell me of Viola?"

"I beg you to be calm, Mrs. Redmond," Howard said, seeing that the kindest way would be to deal frankly with her. "Something has happened; but I hope with your assistance to bring everything out right."

Mrs. Redmond half rose in her chair, a look of fear on her delicate face.

"Have her enemies followed and taken her?" she cried.

He started.

"Then she had enemies?" he cried. "You feared for her?"

"Tell me what has happened!" Mrs. Redmond cried. "Let me know everything, and I shall know better what to do, what to say."

Howard Beekman drew a chair near to Mrs. Redmond and sat down. Then he told her succinctly what had happened.

She listened with an agony of mind hard to describe. It seemed to her as if the worst had happened to her darling child, and yet she only suspected that she had been followed by her enemies and arrested.

"Oh, my poor, poor child!" she moaned. "Mr. Beekman, I must tell you the whole truth in order that you may be able to comprehend what has happened. Do you know the firm of Hardman & Son?"

"Very well."

She was employed there. The son of Mr. Hardman saw her and fell in love with her."

"In love with her!" gasped Howard, feeling a shock of jealousy run through him. "And—and did she return this love? Was it an honorable love?"

"Perfectly honorable. Walter Hardman is a noble-hearted young man; and Viola——"

"Do not tell me that she loved him!" he interposed, with pallid lips.

The widow stared at him with amazement.

"She did return his love," she replied. "Is there any reason that you know why it should not be?"

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried; "I know the best of reasons. I love your daughter, and have cherished the hope that some day I might win her love and make her my wife. I know that I am much older, but age should be no bar. I would make her rich, and would strive with all my soul to make her happy. My mother loves her dearly, and looks forward to the happy consummation of my hope."

Mrs. Redmond shook her head pityingly.

"I am sorry," she said earnestly. "I am the more sorry because I know that his love for her is the cause of all her misery."

"Then why should she not be weaned from him? Why would it not be well to lead her heart from him, so that I may make her happy?"

The widow shook her head.

"Do you know so little of the passion of love, sir? Ah! you could never cause those two hearts to love any other. But you will understand why I wish she could love you when you hear my story."

With this she told him what had happened to Viola, explaining besides what the detective, who had visited her several times, had told her of the probable nature of the plot against Viola.

"I see it all," Howard said. "They **have** traced her

to my house, and have stolen her away with the aid of an officer of the law. Even now she may be, and probably is, locked up in some prison cell. Oh, I must see this detective who has been so kind! I will tell him what has happened, and it may be that he will know what to suggest."

"Thank you, sir," Mrs. Redmond said.

"And do not fear any more," Mr. Beekman said earnestly. "I am rich, and I will spend every cent I have, if necessary, in order to rescue her. Have no doubt that we will expose this terrible plot against her, and free her fair name. But there is one thing I beg of you."

"What is it? If it is anything in my power I will accede to it."

"You admitted that it would be better for Viola if she were my wife. In all the world there is no one who would seek to injure her because she was loved by me. If she were mine she would be safe from harm."

"Alas! I see that. But of what avail is it to admit it?"

"Listen to me," he said vehemently. "Walter Hardman is but a boy, dependent on the favor of his father. My wealth is all my own, and at the mercy of no one."

"I realize that. But what of it? She loves him."

"Yes; but if he has deserted her, and is of no use to

her in the hour of her dire peril, what right has he to stand between her and me?"

"Ah," said Mrs. Redmond, "I would choose you for her husband, for I am sure you would make her happy, and then all her troubles would be over when she was your wife. But of what avail is it what I prefer? She loves him, and will never give him up."

"But I love her," he said doggedly. "They say everything is fair in love and war. Will you help me to win her?"

"I will do anything I can for you," she said. "Walter has gone away, to be gone a year, and during that time her enemies may ruin her fair young life. I freely say I would rejoice to see her your wife."

"And when the time comes, then," he said eagerly, "you will be ready to add the weight of your word to my pleading?"

"Assuredly I will."

"Then," he cried hopefully, "I shall win her. Already I have a plan in my mind, which seems to me will enable me to find her."

"You will go at once to the detective, will you not?" she asked anxiously.

"No; and I beg you not to say a word to the detective should he chance to call on you. Give me a few hours in which to report. If I do not come to you to-morrow morning, or even by midnight to-night, and

say that I shall set her free, you may then apply to the detective."

"But anything may happen in the meantime," she said anxiously. "Remember she is my child!"

"And she is my love. Better than all the rest of the world, I love her. I swear to you that I will leave no stone unturned to set her free and make her happy."

CHAPTER XX.

CUPID AT ANY COST.

Howard Beekman left the presence of Mrs. Redmond, filled with the idea of separating Viola from Walter. He had spoken no more than the truth when he had said that his not overkeen mind had conceived a scheme which had every promise of yielding good results.

He hastened from the poor tenement to the nearest taxicab stand, and gave the address of one of the most fashionable mansions in the city.

When the house was reached he mounted its steps with a feeling quite different from that which had stirred him on going up the creaking steps to Mrs. Redmond's room.

"Is Miss Carroll at home?" he asked of the servant, and was shown with obsequious attention into the reception room.

Howard paced the floor of the room while the servant was delivering his card. He knew Eunice Carroll, having met her in society, and it was in direct pursuance of his plan that he had come to her, who, he had no doubt, was one of the enemies who was persecuting Viola.

Presently he heard the rustling of her silk skirts as she swept down the staircase. He seated himself and waited with calm face, prepared to meet the haughty beauty.

Eunice wondered why she should be called on by Howard Beekman. She asked herself if it was possible that he suspected her of having had any hand in the abduction of his guest.

But she had the wit to act as if that was the last thing in her mind. She entered the room with a pleasant smile on her face, and with her little hand outstretched.

"I am so pleased to see you, Mr. Beekman," she said. "I had heard you were living in the country this winter."

He smiled and looked fixedly into her dark eyes.

"Who was it told you I was in the country?" he asked.

A faint shade of color tinted her olive cheeks as he spoke in this peculiar manner, but she answered steadily:

"I don't think I could recall. It is generally known, is it not?"

"I think it is, Miss Carroll," he answered. "But never mind that. I have a request to make of you. I wonder if you will grant it?"

"Better make the request and find out, then," she said, with a smile.

"It is a serious matter," he said. "I am much older than you, Miss Carroll, but I am not so old that I cannot feel the throbbing of love in my heart. It is in your power to aid me win the object of my love, and I have come to beg you to do it."

"But, Mr. Beekman!" she stammered, gazing at him with a sort of dismay. For it was not possible, from his words, to be sure that she was not the person he referred to.

"I hope you will do as I wish," he said earnestly. "I know that I am appealing to one who knows the power of love. I am sure that you love Walter Hardman. That being so, you should be willing to help me."

She closed her lips tightly together. She could not yet comprehend what he meant, and was only sure that he did not meditate a proposal to her.

"I do not know by what right you make that assertion," she said coldly.

"Do not be angry," he said. "I was forced to approach my point in this way, in order that you might fully understand me. I love Viola Redmond, and I know she is in your way. Will you not be frank with me now? She does not love me, but yet I must win her. We can help each other if you only will."

"Why do you appeal to me in this way?"

"Because I know that you have been instrumental in spiriting her away from my house. You see, I am frank with you."

"You are mistaken," Eunice said, her face paling.

"No, I am not mistaken," he said. "I know your whole plot with that man, Harriem. I could have her found and set free. But if I do that, she will go on loving Walter Hardman, and what I wish is to separate those two. So I come to you to ask you to help me win her, while at the same time you win back Walter Hardman. Will you do it?"

"How can I aid you? What am I to do?" she asked.

"You are to reveal all the details of your plot to me, and let me turn the situation to my own advantage."

"If I could only be sure that you would deal fairly with me," she said.

"The best pledge of that," he rejoined, "is the fact that our interests are identical."

"But I," she said, with an outburst of fierceness that startled him, "will have Walter at any cost. Nothing shall stand in my way. I will crush to the earth any human being who comes between him and me. Are you willing to go so far?"

"I will go any lengths," he replied. "My life is bound up in her, and I must have her."

"Very well, then. I will tell you what I have done.

But let me warn you, Mr. Beekman, it would be far better for you to put yourself under the claws of an enraged tigress than to attempt to play me false."

"Have no such fear. If I had wished to betray you, why need I have come to you at all? It is Viola I wish, and that is all."

"I believe you," Eunice said, calming herself. "What I have done is simple. Peter Harriem followed Viola and knew you had taken her into your home in the country."

"She has been under surveillance since the first, then?" he cried.

"Since the first moment she encountered you at the station," was the response. "I engaged the services of an unscrupulous detective, who has abducted her, and who is to confine her in a cell made to resemble a prison cell. She is to be tried as if by a real court, and is to be sentenced to prison for ten years. By that time we hope to have her fears so worked on that she will be willing to marry Peter Harriem in order to become free. That was the plan. It only needs to substitute you for him. He knows nothing of her abduction. How does the plan strike you?"

"It will not do. I have a better. Let all be done as you say, though it tears my soul to think of subjecting her to such misery. But instead of asking her to wed me to free herself, it will be better for me to

offer myself to free her from prison. Then I will take her to my home secretly, and hide her there in the upper rooms."

"I see. She will be hidden from the world then, and will make no effort to free herself. But how will you win her, then?"

"I will make her believe that Walter is false to her before I utter one word of love."

"The plan is good. I will give you the address of the house where she is imprisoned, and you may consult with the men. Ah, we will separate them yet!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"DON'T THROW ME ASIDE."

Peter Harriem was delighted with himself. He believed he had managed the affair of Viola with a skill that redounded greatly to his credit.

He had put his brains into the scheme, and others did the work and paid the entire expenses of it, besides.

The only trouble he had was that he could not fully trust Eunice.

So he spent much of his spare time in going where he could catch a glimpse of her, in order that he might judge by her expression how the plot was succeeding.

Then, because there was no other way of doing, he took an occasional trip to see Viola herself.

His plan, when in the Beekman grounds, was to hide behind a tree and watch for Viola.

After he had seen her, and had gloated over her fresh young beauty for a while, he would sneak away and take the train home.

But as he knew that Eunice must have agents, he watched for them, too, and one day he detected a fellow stealing through the trees, and hiding.

That man he followed with such success that, although he was left behind the first time, the second

time he discovered the house which the conspirators were preparing for their unhappy prisoner.

After that Peter's only task was to learn when Viola was abducted. No wonder he felt like the master of the situation.

One night he was sneaking past the Carroll mansion, when a gentleman stepped out of a cab and swept up the steps to the door.

Always on the alert, Peter immediately timed his steps so that he could turn about and walk back in time to see the gentleman when the door opened.

"Howard Beekman!" he muttered. "What is he doing there? I will find out somehow."

He puzzled his brains for an idea until at last he saw Howard Beekman come out of the house again.

A person less shrewd than he was must have recognized the fact that there was a difference between the way Howard had gone into the house and the way he came out.

"He has been successful in whatever he went there for," was what Peter said to himself.

And as that idea flashed into his brain, another came with it.

"What would Howard Beekman, Viola's employer, have to say to Eunice Carroll that should make him happy? What but some arrangement with her that would give him Viola. He loves Viola."

He saw how his chances were imperiled, and his face grew white with anger and fear. Nevertheless, he did not think of giving up.

He walked several times around the block to give himself time to recover his self-control and to collect his ideas.

Then he walked up to the door of the Carroll mansion and rang the bell with an assured hand.

The footman's stare at him was supercilious, but the servant recalled that the same sneaking-looking individual had once before been admitted to the house, and he admitted him.

When her maid, Stella, told her that Peter Harriem was waiting for her in the reception room, Eunice frowned, and was on the point of sending word that she could not see him.

But she changed her mind and bade the maid take word that she would see him in a few minutes.

So she took time to make up her mind what she would say to him. Then she went down to the drawing-room and found Peter sitting on the edge of a chair.

"Ah, Mr. Harriem! is it you?" said Eunice languidly.

Peter knew by her tone that she was going to try to deceive him in some way.

"Yes, Miss Carroll," he said fawningly. "I thought

I would come to ask you if you had decided what you would do about that girl."

"Girl!" repeated Eunice, with a slight raising of the eyebrows. "Oh, you mean that wretched creature who stole my ring?"

"Yes," he said, "the one who stole your ring."

"What was the use of doing anything?" she queried carelessly. "I thought you would do whatever was necessary. She was out of my way already."

"Yes, she was out of your way, it is true," he said. "But she has been able to write to Walter."

Eunice started.

"To Walter!" she cried, her appearance of indifference disappearing. "How do you know that?"

"If I had no other way of telling than by reasoning, I would be sure of it. But I know it from his father. Walter has cabled."

"Cabled what?"

"That he is coming home."

"Coming home! Walter coming home! Why?"

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"She has written him about her arrest, I suppose. She may even have told him the whole story of the ring."

Eunice turned pale. She wondered why she had not thought of all that before. She cursed herself for not having taken measures to prevent any correspondence.

"I will kill her if she has," she hissed. "I will not let her have him!"

"If you have done nothing as yet," Peter said, "I do not see what you can do now. For my part, I shall give her up and try to make terms with Walter. He will never forgive anybody who has injured Viola."

Eunice sprang to her feet, forgetful of the part she had set out to play, and thinking only of the possibility of losing Walter.

"She is in my power!" she cried. "I will destroy her!"

"How can she be in your power when she is not in prison?" he said. "Ah, if we had only carried out that plan, I could see a way by which we could make Walter think her story to him a pure falsehood. But it is too late. We might as well give up."

"Give up? Never! But I do not see what difference it would make if we had her in our hands. What could you do?"

Peter was quite convinced now that Viola had been abducted, and that Eunice had intended to play him false.

He shrugged his shoulders with his exasperating humility, and whined:

"What is the use of talking about it? Good night, Miss Eunice! I am sorry our pretty little plot should have miscarried."

He rose to go. But she glided in front of him and detained him, her lips trembling.

"Tell me what you would have done had we carried out our plan of abducting her?" she said.

"What is the use of wasting time over that?" he said. "Abduct her first, and I will show you how we could make Walter's visit an advantage to you."

"She is abducted!" Eunice cried fiercely. "I have just received word."

He raised his eyebrows, then smiled cunningly.

"And yet you tried to make me believe you had forgotten about her. Oh, Miss Carroll, I am afraid you only think she is abducted."

"I tell you it is true. See! read this letter."

She snatched a letter from her pocket and showed it to Peter. He noticed that it was postmarked in the city and had a special-delivery stamp.

He knew by that that a messenger had been sent from up the river, and that he had posted the letter after his arrival.

He opened the letter and read it carefully, Eunice standing in front of him gnawing her red lips.

"Yes," he said, as he replaced the letter in the envelope, "I see that she is in your hands."

"Now tell me your plan," she said.

He rubbed his hands together for a moment, a peculiar smile in his beady eyes.

"Tell me yours first," he said.

"My plan! you know it was to try her and then let you win her in marriage by offering to release her."

His smile broadened on his gaunt face, and he rubbed his hands harder than ever.

"What was your arrangement with Mr. Howard Beekman?" he asked.

She started. She saw that she had been detected in her plot with Howard. But she cared nothing for Howard. She only cared to win Walter.

"What do you know of that?" she demanded sharply.

"I know that you made some arrangement with him, and that you intended to let me take care of myself," he answered. "I think you would find me a better help than Mr. Beekman."

She thought so herself, now. This fawning wretch was shrewder than she had thought. The only thing was to betray to him what she had agreed on with Howard.

This she did without compunction. Peter listened to the end with a smiling face.

"Now tell me your plan," she said, when she had finished her narration.

He let something in the nature of a grin flit across his face.

"I had no plan. Walter is not coming home. I merely wished to show you that you would be unwise

to try to throw me aside. You cannot do without me. I have followed everything you have done. You see, I was here at the right time. Give me a letter to your men, saying I am the one to be obeyed. I will look out for the rest."

Eunice's black eyes blazed as they looked on the man who had tricked her into a betrayal of herself. But she realized that he was far too shrewd to be trifled with.

If she would win Walter it must be through him and not through Howard.

"Will you promise not to embroil me with Mr. Beckman?" she asked.

"I shall make use of him just as I have of you," he said slyly.

CHAPTER XXII.

INNOCENT OF THE CRIME.

Poor little Viola! So far as she was concerned the deception was perfect.

She believed she had been arrested for the crime of which she was not guilty; and as she recalled the circumstances of her previous arrest, she had no doubt that she would be convicted.

The troubled night had gone by, and she sat in her little cell trying to compose her mind to the terrible truth which she believed confronted her.

When the man came in the morning with her breakfast, she asked him a number of questions which delighted the conspirators who listened to his report.

They knew positively now that their ruse had been successful. They prepared with a good heart to impose upon her to the end.

About ten o'clock in the morning her jailer came to her to bid her get ready to go with him to the courtroom, where the judge was waiting.

She was taken upstairs into a room which had been made to look somewhat judicial by a few little devices.

"What is this case?" the wretch impersonating the judge demanded of the man playing the part of jailer.

"This is the case of the girl who is charged with stealing a diamond ring from Miss Eunice Carroll," was the response.

"Are there any witnesses?" demanded the judge.

"Three, your honor," was the response.

"Your honor," said a third man, who had the air of a lawyer, "I move that the trial be postponed so that a jury may be impaneled. This is an important case, and I think it proper that a jury trial be held."

The judge frowned. Viola clasped her hands in terror, and burst forth in a broken voice that should have softened a heart of stone:

"Oh, sir, I am innocent of this crime! Indeed, I never thought of touching the young lady's jewels. I am the victim of a conspiracy."

"There, there! that will never do, my girl," said the judge sternly. "If you are going to talk in that way, there will remain nothing for me to do but to impanel a jury. I had hoped you would be reasonable. But I see how it is: nothing short of a trial will satisfy you. But let me tell you, my girl, that, with the evidence against you, I do not see how you can hope to escape a sentence of fifteen years, at least, unless you choose to plead guilty; in which case I will make the sentence ten years."

Poor child! How was she to guess that these men

were vile impostors, who were making a ridiculous travesty of the law?

"I am innocent, I am innocent," she sobbed.

"Take her away!" roared the pretended judge; "and bring that fellow here from number nineteen, so that I may sentence him to death. Let in the people who are waiting outside."

Viola was led away unresisting. She neither cried nor sobbed now, but maintained a terrible calm.

The talk of sentencing a man to death had put the finishing touch to her terror. There was neither doubt nor hope in her mind.

When she was well out of the way, the men in the room burst into a laugh.

"I call that pretty well done," said the man, who had played the part of lawyer.

"Why, yes," said Purdy, who had impersonated the judge, "I flatter myself we made no mistake there. The trial, however, will be harder work."

"What's the use of a trial?" demanded the other, who was known as Steve Bolton. "Why can't we let it go as it is? We can't very well frighten her any more, and we may spoil what we have done. Ah! there is a rap at the door. Shall I go?"

"I will," said Purdy. "You never can tell what is going to happen."

He went to the door and opened it. He started back at the sight of one whom he had every reason to fear. Howard Beekman stood there.

"Well," demanded Purdy, "what d'you want?"

"I want to talk to you about Miss Viola Redmond," was the response.

A dangerous gleam came into the eyes of the scoundrel.

"I don't know anything about any such person," he said.

"Yes, you do. Don't be afraid of me. I come with a letter from Miss Carroll. It will tell you that I am to be trusted."

He handed the letter to Purdy and waited patiently while he read it. As soon as the latter had finished it, he said suspiciously:

"I don't know about it."

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Beekman impatiently. "Even if you choose to doubt me after reading the letter, I suppose it is only a matter of money. I assure you the letter is genuine. I know all about the plan to abduct and try the young lady. Nevertheless, I will pay you liberally if you will assist me as the letter demands."

"It seems kind o' funny for you to be coming when the——"

"When you just took her from my house," inter-

jected Mr. Beekman. "Yes, I understand that. But it is a fact, nevertheless. Will you do as I wish?"

Purdy considered for a moment.

"If I am well paid I will do anything not too dangerous," he answered.

"Then let us go inside," Mr. Beekman said.

The door closed on them, and Purdy's accomplices came up to them.

Howard Beekman shuddered inwardly at the looks of the men he was plotting with against the girl he declared he loved.

But the thought of Walter hardened his heart against every thought of a better course, and he said doggedly:

"Tell me what you have done thus far."

Purdy told him circumstantially, and a twinge of sharp pain darted through Howard Beekman's heart as he listened.

"She is horribly frightened now," Bolton said, with a coarse laugh, "and I have been saying we might just as well let it rest where it is as to take the chances of playing the rest of the game."

"I agree with you," said Howard.

"And how will you carry out the rest of the plot?" demanded Purdy.

"I have thought of that," replied Howard. "She must have some money with her. Why not let the

man who plays the part of jailer offer to give her a chance to escape if she will give him what she has?"

"That is all right. Then what?"

"Then I will meet her outside some distance from here, and will not let her suspect that I know anything about what has happened. If she tells me, I will pretend to be frightened for her, and will offer to hide her in my house. If she agrees she will be practically out of the world, and no one will know where she is."

"The thing will work," said Purdy, after a few moments of reflection. "She is so frightened now that she will be ready to do anything to escape from here. It shall be done. How about your little contribution?"

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"A thousand apiece will be little enough, I think," was the answer.

"Here are two thousand dollars," Mr. Beekman responded, producing the money. "I will give you the remainder any time you may set."

"I will meet you near the lake in your grounds to-night," Purdy answered.

"Do not injure Miss Redmond," Howard said. "Do not be rough in order to play your parts too well."

Purdy laughed.

"I suppose you want to have the monopoly of all that yourself. All right. You have paid for it, and she shall be treated right. You may go away with a com-

plete assurance that she will be released within two hours."

"I suppose she will go out by the back door?" queried Howard."

"Yes, that will be the best way. Good day, sir."

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEEMINGLY GUILTY.

Howard Beekman had lived all his life an honorable man, yet he was now plotting against the peace and happiness of the woman he professed to love.

He left the men with a shudder because of the evil that was in them. And yet he was worse than they. For he would go from them and pass in the world as a good man.

But while there was remorse in his breast for what he was doing against Viola, there was no hesitation.

"She will learn to love me better than ever she did Walter," he said to himself, as he walked away from the house, and found shelter from the winds in the woods not far away.

Purdy, in the meantime, had turned to his associates, when they were alone, and had said:

"Well, it doesn't matter what happens, we have made a good bit of business out of this. Now, Mr. Jailer, do your part of the play, and we shall soon be rid of the girl, and will, moreover, be some few thousands in pocket now, to say nothing of several thousands more in the way of blackmail later on."

Steve Bolton laughed.

"Oh!" he cried, "to think of the rich picking there will be in the days to come, when our good friends are safely married. We can bleed Beckman and Miss Carroll until they will wish they had never heard of us."

All three laughed boisterously, and the jailer went down to Viola's cell, to play his nefarious rôle.

He opened the door and looked in on her, saying with a gruff sort of sympathy:

"Is there anything I can do for you, miss? I'm a father and have a daughter not far from your age, and I wouldn't like to see her in such a scrape."

"Oh, sir," cried Viola, "if I were guilty it would be a different matter. But I am innocent, as innocent as your own daughter!"

"If I only thought so," the man said, "I would risk a good deal to help you."

"Help me! Can any one help me now?" she cried eagerly. "Oh, if you will but aid me I will promise you—— But, alas! how can I promise anything? I have some money with me. Will you take that? Oh, if I could only escape!"

"Do you think I would take your money, miss? If you are innocent—and I can't help thinking you are, somehow—I will try to let you escape, if it costs me my place. But no, there is Bill, the turnkey; he would have to have money to get him to keep out of the way."

Viola drew her money from her pocket and thrust it eagerly into his hand, saying:

"Take it; give it to him. Oh, sir, aid me to escape and I will never forget you! I am innocent. It was a plot to ruin me. But never mind that. Give this money to the other man, and help me, for your daughter's sake."

"Well, well," he said gruffly, "I can make it seem as if you had worked your way out. I will let you go. But, mind you, I wouldn't touch a cent of this money, if it was not to give it to Bill."

"I wish it was a large sum," Viola said.

"Well, it isn't much," the wretch said, shaking his head. "And Bill is such a shark! Perhaps if you had any jewels of any sort?"

The only jewel of value she had was the ring Walter had given her when he went away, and that she could not bear to part with.

"I—I have only a—a ring," she stammered, turning the stone inward. "It is very dear to me. Don't you think he will take the money if you tell him I will send him more?"

"Oh, you couldn't catch him that way, miss. He's too sharp for that. He'll take all he can now, and not trust to the future. Well, I'll tell him about it, and will let you know in a few minutes."

The fellow went away, and returned in a little while

with a long face to say that Bill would not think of letting her go unless she would give him something more.

"If I was you, miss, though I don't want to suggest anything, I would let him have that ring. You see, you can always explain how you came to let it go."

The color completely faded out of Viola's cheeks, and the iron of despair entered her soul. Must she give up that precious ring? And yet it must be that or the loss of freedom—the horror of prison—worse than death.

"Give it to him!" she cried, as if the words were torn from her heart.

The scoundrel took the ring and thrust it into his pocket.

"Count on getting out of here in something less than two hours," he said. "At that time there will be nobody here excepting Bill and me, and you will have no difficulty in escaping."

Viola would have pleaded to be taken away at once, but the man gave her no opportunity to do so. He closed the door and went up to his companions, to whom he showed the proceeds of his shameful trickery.

"The ring is worth two hundred, anyhow," he said.

"It is worth two thousand at least," Purdy said coolly, as he held the ring in his hand.

"You are crazy, Sam," said Bolton. "The ring is worth a cent over two hundred and fifty, anyhow."

"I'll bet you a cool hundred that I will sell it for two thousand," Purdy said.

"Done!" ejaculated Bolton.

"Wait here for me for a few minutes, and you shall see," said Purdy.

The others stared.

"What are you going to do?" they demanded.

"Take it to our friend Beekman. If he understands his business, he will pay two thousand for the engagement ring of his rival."

"Well, you have a long head, Purdy," said Bolton, and the other wretch nodded his head admiringly.

Purdy went out and presently returned with Howard, having told him of the ring.

"It will enable you to prove to him that she is faithless—don't you see? It is well worth all I ask for it."

Howard Beekman knew that, in buying that ring, he was as guilty as the men who had tricked it from Viola. But he readily saw how it could be used to separate the lovers, and he did not hesitate.

"I have not the money," he said. "But I always carry my check book of my private account. Will a check do?"

"Certainly. And you might as well make it for three thousand, so as to include everything."

So the check was made out in that way, and Howard went away again, this time bearing with him the ring which was the sign of the betrothal of Walter and Viola.

Meanwhile the poor victim was waiting with throbbing heart for the man to come to set her free.

The time came at last when the man came to her with her hat and coat, together with a thick shawl, which he told her to wrap around her head, so as to avoid recognition.

And to be sure that she was sufficiently enfolded in the shawl, he wound it about her himself.

Then, with an appearance of great stealth and secrecy, he led her forth from the cell, and dragged her swiftly to the back door, which he opened and through which he dragged her so quickly that she would have had no time to look about, even if she had had the inclination.

But she was too glad to escape to think of studying her surroundings. She followed her leader across the open space into the woods:

On and on he led her until they had reached the road, where, with a hurried whisper to her to keep right on, he left her.

She needed no urging, but sped along the side of the road, and did not slacken her pace for an hour. Then it was the sound of jingling sleigh bells that made her

stop and look around, her bosom heaving from her exertions.

A sleigh was flying toward her over the smooth road, and her first impulse was to dart aside into the woods to escape observation.

Then something familiar in the horse, next in the driver, claimed her attention, and with a wild cry of, "Mr. Beekman!" she sank swooning in the snow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DEEP REGRETS.

No one would have known the sedate, calm man of the world in the Howard Beekman who sprang from the sleigh and caught up the fainting form of Viola in his arms.

His intense, mad passion had transformed him. He hugged her inanimate form to his breast and rained kisses on her cold cheeks.

If Viola had but come to consciousness while he was so dishonorably stealing the sweets of her dewy lips she would have known her peril from him.

But her swoon continued until after he had placed her in the sleigh and had urged his horses on again.

He had wrapped her up well in the robes so that she could not suffer from the cold, and his eyes were more on her than on his flying animals.

He saw the color returning to the pale cheeks, and watched eagerly for the first glance of the lovely eyes when they should open.

He would have given all he possessed if he could have been sure that, when the long lashes lifted from the round cheeks, the brown eyes would have in them a look of love for him.

But he knew very well that they would not. And the thought made him hate Walter, as if the latter were the one at fault.

The brown eyes opened, and in them was a look of terror that should have won him to remorse for the misery he was causing her.

A cry of fear rose to her lips, but before it could escape, she recognized her companion, and cried out joyfully:

"Oh, Mr. Beekman! it is you. Oh, save me! save me!"

"I will save you; I will. Trust in me!"

He was bending over her, with his passion flaming in his eyes, when he recalled to himself that he must put a guard over his madness, and he added:

"From what must I save you, Viola? Why did you leave us?"

"I was stolen away," she answered, with a shudder of fear. "I—I was—arrested. Oh, do not turn from me because of that. But save me, for I am innocent."

"Arrested!" he cried, with an easily simulated laugh of incredulity. "Of what did any one accuse you? Of course you are innocent. I will take you home with me and no one shall touch you."

"I dare not go there," she said despairingly. "Oh, take me to the railroad station and let me go hide myself in the great city."

"No, no!" he said. "You shall go to my mother. I have wealth and can protect you. Trust in me!"

"You are very kind, but you do not understand," she moaned. "I was accused of stealing a diamond ring when I was in the city. I should have told you at first, but I had not the courage. I thought I would be safe with you. But they found me and took me to prison."

"To prison!" he exclaimed. "How, then, do you come to be free now?"

"I bribed the jailer to set me free, and he did so. So now I must hide in some safe place until my innocence can be proven."

"What safer place can there be than my house, Viola?" he asked, making a strenuous effort to hide his passion.

"It would be known that I was there, and I should be dragged back to prison. I think I should go mad if I were to be taken there again."

"Who would know that you were there?" he demanded. "Who would tell the miscreants?"

"The servants would tell. They would see me go into the house, and would not know that they should not tell."

"But what if I could get you into the house unknown to them? Would not that do?" he asked.

"How could you do it?" she asked, so eagerly that

he knew she would fall a ready victim to his nefarious plot against her happiness.

"I could drive about until it was dark, and then could easily smuggle you into the house. I could give you a room in the wing that is never used. You could live there for months without a suspicion on the part of anybody."

"It would be such a trouble to you," she said faintly.

"We care too much for you to think of the trouble," he answered, his eyes almost betraying him.

"But your mother?" queried Viola. "What will she think when she knows that I am accused of theft, and have been arrested?"

"She will think exactly as I do: that you cannot be guilty of so absurd a charge. How can you doubt our love for you, Viola?"

She started a little at the fervor of his tone, and cast an involuntary look into his eyes. He saw his mistake, and said hastily:

"My mother loves you for yourself, and I can never be grateful enough for saving my darling boy."

His words dissipated any faint suspicion that might have entered her brain, and she thought no more of the matter.

"If I were sure she would not care," Viola murmured, "I should be so grateful to you."

"I know she will not care," he said.

"But it will be terrible to go driving about until dark," she said, with a last faint scruple.

"If I had not found you, I should have driven about all day with despair and grief in my heart," he said. "I came out provided with everything to enable me to be gone all day. There is a camping stove in the sleigh, and I have food. You will not suffer."

"I was not thinking of myself," she said; "I was thinking only of you."

"I am so happy at having found you," he said, "that I shall never think of anything but that. You do not know how wretched we were when we learned that you were gone. I was out all last evening and all to-day. I would never have given up until I had found you."

"How good you are to me!" she murmured gratefully.

"It is easy to be good to you," he said. "But tell me how it happened to you. Let me know everything, so that I may know how to act."

So she told him the whole story just as he already knew it, and he listened to her sweet voice without paying much heed to her words.

It was plain, even to him, that her love for Walter occupied her whole soul. But with the infatuation of one who will see but one side, he persuaded himself that he could wean her from her love.

And now he knew that he must begin his course of deception toward her if he would hope to part her from Walter.

"You love him very much," he said, when she had finished.

"I love him with all my heart," she answered, with a vivid blush that made her face look divinely beautiful.

"Have you written to him about your trouble?" he asked.

"Yes. I have told him everything."

"Then he will be sure to return home and come here to my house to seek you, I should think?" he said.

"I hope he will," she replied, in a low tone.

She was, in fact, living on that hope.

"Of course he will," he said slowly. "He certainly will if he loves you as you love him, and as you deserve to be loved. I almost wonder that he ever consented to leave you. It does not seem the act of a fervent lover."

"Oh! I begged him to go," she said, eager to take Walter's part.

"It certainly was the wisest thing to do," Mr. Beekman said spitefully. "I was only thinking that it would seem as if a true lover would think more of the one he loved than of wealth. Still, he was worldly wise in thinking of his father's wealth."

Viola smiled serenely.

"He neither thought of it, nor cared for it," she said. "If I had been willing, he would have defied his father. But my mother would not give her consent, and not for the world would I have come between a father and his only son. I loved him too well to cause him any pain. We could wait, however hard it might be to do so."

Howard Beekman bit his lip to restrain his anger at her confidence in her lover.

It maddened him to think that no insinuation of his could shake her trust.

"But I will bring her such proofs of her lover's perfidy and falseness," he thought to himself, "that she will be obliged to distrust him. Then she shall be mine."

CHAPTER XXV.

SMALL, BEADY EYES.

Viola was cold and miserable in body when at last it was dark enough for her to be taken to the house, so that she could be smuggled in without being observed by any of the servants.

Mr. Beekman had her get out of the sleigh in the road near the spot where she had met her abductors, and from there she made her way to a place near the house, and waited until he should summon her to enter.

He drove up to the house and had the sleigh taken to the stable at once.

Then he ran into the house, and was met by his mother in the hall.

"What news, Howard?" she cried; then caught a glimpse of his face by the hall lamp, and added eagerly: "Good news, I know. Have you found her?"

"Hush, mother!" he said in a whisper, as he looked cautiously about to see that no one was listening. "I have found her and brought her home. It is a strange, pitiful story. She is the victim of a terrible persecution, and must be hidden for a while. I know you will be her friend."

"Of course I will, Howard. Where is she?"

"She is waiting out of doors until I can arrange to get her into the house unobserved. I thought of getting her into the unused wing, where she could be hidden, and could be made comfortable for a long time."

"What would you have me do?" she asked.

"Be sure that the servants are all downstairs while I call Viola in."

"They are downstairs now without exception," she said. "I will go down and contrive to keep them there in case any of them should seek to come up. You hasten and get the poor child in out of the cold. By the way, why not take her to my room until we can make one of the other rooms comfortable? I will give Mary permission to go out this evening. No one else will go to my room."

So it was arranged. Before many minutes had passed, Viola was in the cheery room of good Mrs. Beekman. And, soon afterward, she was sobbing in very contentment on the ample bosom of the dear old lady.

In the meantime, Howard Beekman was uneasily pacing the floor of the sitting room, waiting for the coming of his mother.

He knew he must have her for an ally, and yet he knew that she would never be a party to the wickedness he contemplated.

"I must deceive her," he said to himself. "I must

concoct a story which will tally with anything Viola may say, and which yet will dispose mother to take my part against Walter Hardman."

He could not recall the time when he had lied to his mother. It was with an inward shudder of shame that he contemplated doing it now.

It startled him to think how easy he found it to concoct a falsehood now. He at last hit upon the right story to tell.

He was ready now for his mother to come. He would tell her such a story as would make her strive hard to turn Viola against Walter.

He had heard the rustle of her gown on the stairs.

"Poor little Viola!" said Mrs. Beekman, as she entered the room.

"How is she feeling?" he asked.

"Quite well now; and so sweetly grateful to us!"

"Did she tell you her story?" he asked anxiously.

"Only a part of it. She said she had told you everything, and that you would tell me."

"Yes," he said, "I will tell you her story, and then I will tell you what she does not know, and what I hope she need never know. You know she was a salesgirl in Hardman & Son's?"

"Yes."

"Well, her story is that Walter Hardman fell in

love with her, and she with him, and that they would have been married but for the opposition of the latter's father. She says that Walter was sent to Europe, to be gone for a year, with the understanding that, if he still loved her on his return, he should wed her. She was promoted in the store, so that she was receiving a better salary, and everything was going nicely, when she was accused of the theft of a diamond ring by Eunice Carroll, who is the woman selected by Mr. Hardman as a suitable wife for his son."

"It looks as if there were some vile plot to ruin the poor girl, in the absence of her lover, so as to break off the engagement," said Mrs. Beekman, her keen intuition leaping at once to the truth.

"That is precisely what it did seem like," he said. "And when I first knew the circumstances I felt like sending a cable message to Paris to Walter Hardman. For, though I loved her, mother, I felt that it was my duty to her to do what would make her happiest."

"That was like you, my noble boy!" Mrs. Beekman said proudly. "Why did you not do it?"

He winced at her undeserved praise of him.

"I would have done it, but an interview with Mrs. Redmond, who is a lovely woman, and just what you would suppose Viola's mother to be—an interview with her induced me to go to the detective who had arrested Viola for the theft."

"Arrested! Poor child!" interrupted Mrs. Beekman.

"He told me everything as soon as he learned what my relation to Viola was; he told me he had connived at her escape on the way to the prison because it had been so clear to him that she was innocent."

"Who could doubt it?" ejaculated Mrs. Beekman.

"He told me, too," Howard went on, turning away so that his mother could not by any possibility read his deceit in his face, "that he had carefully investigated the affair, and that there was no doubt in his mind that the whole affair was a terrible plot to ruin Viola and make it impossible for her to hope to be Walter's wife."

"Scoundrels!" cried Mrs. Beekman.

"And the worst of it was," Howard went on implacably, for there was no retreat for him, "that Walter was a party to the infamy."

"Incredible!" murmured his mother, in a tone of horror.

"So I said," her son went on. "But the detective told me such things that I could no longer doubt."

"He is unfit to live," cried the indignant old lady. "Any one who would plot against the happiness of that girl deserves the worst punishment that can be inflicted."

"The worst that can happen to him," he said, in a

hollow voice, "is that he should lose even the chance of making her his wife."

"Never, never must he wed that lovely creature, Howard," his mother said. "I was regretting that she was lost to you. But now I feel that she must not be lost to you. We must save her from that scoundrel."

"You will help me then to win her?" he said eagerly.

"I will, indeed, both for your sake and for hers?" was the ready response.

"But what shall we do?" he asked. "I would not have the courage to go to her with such a story."

"Of course not. She is far too loyal a little soul to believe you. There is but one thing to do, painful as it will be, and that is to bring his perfidy home to her in such a way that she cannot doubt. It will be a terrible blow to her, but it is better that she should suffer a little to escape a worse blow."

"I will work in harmony with the detective, then," he said eagerly. "And when something occurs which will make it impossible for her to doubt, you will present it to her. If I were to do it, she might not turn to me afterward. I would like her to have only pleasant thoughts connected with me."

"I understand, Howard. It shall be my task to open her eyes to the truth."

He had gained his point, and was filled with tri-

umph, despite the sense of shame at his own double dealing.

Perhaps had he looked out of the window at that moment there would have been still another sensation mingled with his triumph; for glaring in on the mother and son was a pair of small, beady eyes, set in a gaunt, sallow face.

"The fool!" muttered Peter Harriem, as he turned away with an evil grimace. "He thinks he plots for himself, but he is only my tool!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WHY PERMIT IT?"

What, meanwhile, was Walter doing? Did he, indeed, think so little of his love that he felt no qualms about leaving her alone and unprotected?

In truth it had not occurred to him to fear anything definite for her, but he was too much in love not to feel on leaving her as if his heart had been torn from his breast.

On the way over on the steamer he was tortured by all sorts of vague fears of what might happen to him or to Viola during the long year that was to intervene.

But when he reached Paris, he plunged into his work as if determined to keep his mind so occupied that there would be no room for repining.

Then came Viola's first letters, in which she told him enthusiastically of her promotion.

"Father is very good, after all," Walter murmured. "I can see that he intends to take care of her."

He soon discovered that there was really little work for him to do in the Paris agency, and he also discovered that he was gifted with no little business ability.

This led him to insist upon making a thorough ac-

quaintance with every detail of the business; and ended in his starting on a tour of the several agencies in other parts of Europe.

He had left orders that his letters should be forwarded to him; but, owing to some mistake, they were kept at the Paris office.

This fact hastened his return, and he reached Paris again in about two weeks, to find four letters in the precious handwriting which he had learned to know.

He arranged the letters in the order of their arrival, as shown by the postmark, and sat down in his cozy parlor to enjoy the feast which he anticipated.

One by one the letters were read and let fall, the first look of horror growing into an expression of fierce, furious determination.

He muttered angry words as he read, but he hardly stirred from his seat until every word was read and reread.

"It is a plot of that wretch Harriem," he murmured at last. "I can see it. And it would seem as if Eunice must be a party to it. Can it be that father has had a hand in it? Oh, I must not believe that. It would be too infamous for belief."

He leaped up and paced the floor.

Fierce and wrathful as he was, he yet had the good sense to hold his anger in check while he studied the situation.

“Heaven bless those good people who have befriended her!” he murmured. “I will take the first steamer home. But, lest my father may have had a hand in the affair, I will pretend to the agent that I am going back on my tour of the other agencies so that he will not notify father that I am on my way home.”

“I will see Viola. I will cheer her up, and will persuade her to marry me. Then let father do what he will. If he wishes to turn me adrift to earn my own living, I know now that I can do it.”

He carried out his plan exactly as he had laid out, and within three days was on his way to the United States.

He hesitated for a while as to whether he should go to see Mrs. Redmond before going up to Viola. He decided to see Viola first.

When the steamer drew up to the pier, he was one of the first to step on the gangplank and hasten ashore.

He had not taken passage under his own name, and he now drew his coat collar up as if he felt the cold, and pulled his soft hat down so as to be unrecognizable to any acquaintance chancing to be there.

He never thought of glancing around on the sea of faces upturned toward the steamer to watch the passengers come down, and probably it would not have mattered if he had.

But in truth there was a young man in the crowd

who was a clerk in the store of Hardman & Son, and who knew Walter well by sight.

He eyed Walter eagerly and gave a start of joy at recognizing him.

He stole quietly behind him until he saw him take a taxicab and give the direction:

"Grand Central Depot."

Then the young man darted away and did not cease running until he had climbed the stairs of the Sixth Avenue elevated station nearest the pier.

In less than half an hour he stood before the desk of Peter Harriem, out of breath, but with his face filled with triumph.

"Well?" queried Peter, with an eagerness he could not conceal.

"Mr. Walter landed half an hour ago."

The beady eyes twinkled. The cold voice murmured:

"Where did he go?"

"He took a taxicab to the Grand Central Depot."

"That will do. You have earned your promotion. I will go see Mr. Hardman, and tell him how well you have done. He will have a good joke on Mr. Walter."

The young man went away with a smile, muttering:

"All very well, sneaking Peter! you don't fool me like that. But it's none of my business as long as I get my promotion."

Walter, meanwhile, had reached the station, and had learned that he would have to wait an hour before he could get a train that would take him to the station for the Beekman place.

Peter glided out of the store and for once was forced to take a taxicab.

He was in a great hurry to reach the house of Eunice Carroll, and trembled with anxiety lest she should not be in when he reached the house.

He paid the chauffeur his charge, though he made a wry face over doing it, and then rang the bell.

"Tell Miss Carroll," he said, "that Mr. Peter Harriem wishes to see her on very important business."

The man remembered the sallow, mean face of the visitor, and recalled that his mistress had already seen him before, so he ushered Peter into the reception room and went away.

Eunice was down with him in so short a time as to convey to him the fact that she had been waiting anxiously for some news.

"What has happened?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Walter is home, and is on his way to see Viola."

"Why do you permit it?" she demanded furiously.

"I trusted to you to prevent any such thing happening."

"I am doing this in my own way," Peter said, with an ominous glitter in his little eyes. "Please go at

once and write a letter to Howard Beekman, telling him that Walter will be at his house immediately after the receipt by him of the letter."

"Will you be sure to get it to him on time?" she demanded.

"I am going to take it myself," he answered.

"Supposing Walter should see you? Everything would then be spoiled."

"Walter will not see me," he said, in a low tone. "Do not waste time."

Eunice went into another room and wrote a hasty note, telling Howard what Peter had told her to. She returned with it to Peter, and gave it to him.

He placed it in his pocket, after swiftly glancing over it, and glided away, saying:

"He could not catch a train that will take him there before me."

And when he was outside of the house he said, as he darted swiftly up the street:

"Soon I shall have Walter and Howard at each other's throats. Then I shall step in and carry off the prize."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"STRIKE HIM DOWN."

It was an incredible joy to the sly, subtle nature of Peter Harriem that he was able to carry out his plot in the involved, secret manner in which he did.

It seemed to him that he could not fail of his purpose as long as he controlled his puppets.

He rubbed his hands with an infinite relish as he walked away from the house of Eunice Carroll.

His hurry was over now. He had only been afraid he would not find her at home, and would have to seek for her elsewhere. It was another reason for his secret satisfaction that he had known at once that Walter would not be able to catch a train right away to take him up the river.

He had been up there so often that he had learned the trains by heart, and had known the instant the young man had told him of Walter's action, that he would have to cool his impatience in the station.

"How they all have to do just what the despised Peter tells them," he muttered. "Even Walter, who comes from Europe and thinks to have his own will of things, has to be my creature. Aha! he little thinks I shall be on the same train with him, with my web

woven to catch the girl he loves, but who must be mine!"

He glided stealthily into the station and peered around it until his keen eyes fell upon Walter, pacing uneasily up and down at one end.

"He can't wait until he sees her," he murmured. "Well, he will have to learn patience. I wonder why I hate him so. I always did hate him. I think it is because he has always had what I never did have. Curse him for his good looks and his insolence! He always despised me, but in the end I shall triumph."

He sneaked stealthily up to the office and bought his ticket, always keeping his eye on Walter, to be sure that he was not recognized.

When the gates were opened to let the passengers through into the cars, he waited until Walter had passed through and then followed him.

He could not help noticing the assured, strong step of the young man whom he hated, and whose affianced wife he was trying to steal, but he did not lay it to the right cause.

"He is so sure of getting her," he said to himself, with a sneer of hate and malice. "He walks as if he owned the whole earth."

He could not know how Walter had changed in the short time of his absence, for he had never understood

the qualities that lay dormant in him, wanting but little to bring them forth.

He took the car behind Walter, and during the ride up the river kept watching him with a growing hate.

When the cars stopped at the station he was waiting on the step, and was away in the darkening day before Walter was off the car.

He knew there was no need for him to follow Walter now.

Viola was the loadstone that attracted them both, and Walter would now follow him.

Peter had gone over the road so many times that it was very familiar to him, and yet he paused once in his rapid, gliding run and looked about him.

It was a spot where the road ran by the side of a precipice, down the side of which grew a mass of tangled brush, and at the bottom of which was a darksome pool.

Peter could see nothing of this now; for it was already too dark for that; but he knew how it was, and as he paused there he muttered:

"I could wait here; I could leap upon him from behind and strike him down. Then I could throw him over there, and no one would ever know. Curse him! how I would like to do it. But no, he can serve me best alive, now."

It was a murderer's thought and impulse, and ~~the~~

picture of the handsome young man lying dead haunted him. He gloated over the mere idea of it.

He accelerated his pace and ran on until he reached the house of Howard Beekman.

It was lighted up in its usual cheery fashion, and Peter had much ado to steal up to the front door and reach the bell without exposing himself to the flood of light that streamed from the windows.

Not that it would have mattered at all if he had exposed himself, but he loved stealth and secrecy for its own sake.

He kept as much as possible in the shadow when he heard the step of the servant in the hall, and when she opened the door he said:

"Tell Mr. Beekman there is a man to see him on important business. I won't come in."

He reached out and pulled the door shut in her face, much to her alarm and amazement, but his action had the desired effect. She ran quickly to her master, and said:

"There is a strange man at the door to see you, sir. He wouldn't come in. He said important business."

Howard Beekman lived a life of inward but intense excitement in those days. He fancied all sorts of things, and waited for something to happen which would guide him to his right course.

He started up at the girl's words, and ran to the

door, which he snatched open impetuously. He peered out, and saw the dimly outlined figure of a man in the vestibule.

"Who are you—what do you want?" he demanded.

"A letter from Miss Carroll," said Peter. "Read it quickly. There is no time to lose."

Howard snatched the letter from the long fingers, and forgot the man in his interest in the letter.

"Come in!" he said mechanically, as he retreated toward the hall lamp.

"No. Be quick. The man mentioned in the letter is on his way here now," said Peter, pulling the door shut, and gliding out to the porch, that he might watch for the coming of Walter.

"He is sure to be late," he muttered. "He would not come without asking directions, and that would take time."

The door of the house opened, and Howard stepped out, saying huskily:

"The letter says you are to be trusted."

"I am," said Peter, sinking lower into his upturned coat collar.

"You know everything?" asked Howard.

"Everything. Walter Hardman is not five minutes away from here."

"She—she advises nothing," said Howard, his own

wits hard at work to no purpose in the face of the peril menacing him.

"She told me to tell you that you must make him think the young lady has gone."

"That part is plain. I had determined on that. What else?"

"Then you must go to her mother and persuade her not to reveal the truth."

"I have already persuaded her of that. She is my ally."

"Ah, is it so? Then go to her, and if you can get her to give Walter back his engagement ring, telling him that the girl wishes to break the engagement, you will be all right."

"What do you know of the ring?" demanded Howard, startled.

"Miss Carroll knows everything that happened. Will you do what I say?"

"Who are you?" demanded Howard, with sudden suspicion.

"What does it matter? I am bound to do Miss Carroll a service. She told me the facts and asked my advice. I told her what I have told you."

"But why should she——"

Peter laid his hand on the other's arm and hushed him.

"Hark! he is coming. I must get out of the way."

I have given you all the advice I have to give. You must use your own judgment about taking it. You will have to play your part well. Good night!"

He escaped down the steps, and glided away into the shrubbery, where he crouched. Howard went in, after a moment of hesitation, and softly closed the door.

He stood for a moment in the hall in indecision. What should he do before meeting Walter! What sort of man would he turn out to be? Who was the messenger?

Then he darted up the stairs and went into his mother's little parlor, where the old lady spent a great deal of her time, because later in the evening Viola would come down and sit with her.

"Mother," he said abruptly, "I must have a few words with you."

"Something has happened," she said quickly. "Tell me what it is."

"Walter Hardman has come home."

"Ah, he will see Viola, then," she said at once.

"He is on his way here now. I have received word from my detective that he is coming. He will be here any minute. There is his ring now. What shall we do?"

"He must not see Viola," Mrs. Beekman said, with

decision. "The girl would believe in him, and go with him."

"That is so," said Howard eagerly. "But what can we do? I feel that he would not believe me if I were to tell him she was not here."

"He might not believe you," she said. "He is sure to believe me."

"You, mother! would you tell him a falsehood?" he demanded joyously.

He had hoped for it, but had not believed that anything would persuade his mother to say what was not true.

She turned to him and placed her hand upon his arm; her sweet face was troubled but firm.

"Howard," she said, "I must save Viola at any cost. If he discovers that she is here, he will find means to see her. He has not returned from Europe to see her unless he is terribly infatuated. I will mislead him. Leave it to me."

"But I should be present at the interview," he said.

He did not dare to remain away, although he would have been glad to escape meeting Walter.

"Yes," she replied, "you should be present. We will greet him courteously and give him a welcome as if we did not suspect him in any way. We will even urge him to remain overnight. It will be easy to keep

Viola in the wing. She will never know that he has been here, and he will have any possible suspicion set at rest."

"What would I do without you, mother? Here comes Mary to tell us he is here!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GOOD INTENTIONS.

Walter walked into the sitting room of the Beekman house, his whole being vibrating with hope.

He had asked for Mr. or Mrs. Beekman rather than for Viola, because he had wished to be courteous. He knew she was a sort of companion to Mrs. Beekman, and he thought it would be better to ask to see either the old lady or her son.

He could not sit down restfully, for his eagerness to see his darling was too great to permit of repose of manner.

All the way to the house he had dwelt on her image, and had reveled in the thought of how he would sweep away every scruple she had against a hasty and secret marriage.

He thought how yielding he had been before going away, and smiled happily as he realized how he had changed.

"Perhaps," he murmured, "she did not think me manly enough. She may have feared to trust herself to me, in spite of her great love. For I know she did love me."

He paused in front of the blazing fire on the hearth

and listened eagerly for some sound to indicate the coming of some one.

"How good these kind friends have been to her!" he murmured. "I must think of some way of proving my gratitude. I hear the rustle of a dress."

He stopped and turned toward the door, his handsome face lighted up by a smile of expectation. Mrs. Beekman entered the room.

Walter had no doubt it was she the moment his eyes fell upon her, for Viola had described her to him in more than one letter.

"I know this is Mrs. Beekman," he said, stepping forward quickly and putting out his hand. "My name is Walter Hardman. Viola has told you of me, I know."

Mrs. Beekman took the outstretched hand and pressed it cordially.

She studied the handsome face earnestly. She told herself instantly that no scoundrel ever had eyes like his.

She felt in her heart that he was worthy of Viola; and yet there was the direct evidence given her son that Walter was base and unworthy.

"Yes," she said, "Viola has spoken of you many times. I did not know you were home. Have you seen Viola?"

"No," he replied, with a bright, eager smile. "I have not met her yet. I asked for you first."

Howard Beekman entered the room at this point, and Mrs. Beekman turned and introduced him to Walter.

"You have heard Viola speak of Mr. Hardman, I am sure, Howard," she said.

"Why, no, mother," he said, "I must confess that I never have. But if Mr. Hardman is a friend of hers he is very welcome here. Miss Redmond saved my little boy from a horrible death, Mr. Hardman. Have you seen her lately, by the way?"

Walter turned from Howard to his mother, a strange, perplexed expression creeping into his eyes.

"Seen her lately!" he repeated. "I have just returned from Europe, and came here at once. I am impatient to see her. She—is to be my wife, you know."

"Your wife!" exclaimed Howard, looking at his mother with pretended amazement. "Did she ever tell you so, mother?" he asked.

Walter stared with growing anxiety. A vague fear was forming in his heart, though he could not give it expression.

Mrs. Beekman shook her head at the question. It happened that she could truthfully answer:

"No, she never spoke of such a thing while she was here. But it does not matter," she added, with a pleasant smile. "If you and she are to be married, I can

most heartily congratulate you, for a sweeter girl I never met. I hope you hear good news of her?"

"Good news of her!" repeated Walter slowly.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Beekman. "We have worried greatly over her since she left us so suddenly."

"Left you suddenly!" gasped Walter. "What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you did not know," said Howard. "Of course she could not have written to you in time for you to get the letter before leaving the other side."

"In mercy," cried Walter, "will you tell me what you mean? I thought Viola was here. Is she not here? If not, where then?"

"Then you do not know!" cried Mrs. Beekman. "Oh! I hope nothing has happened to her. She left us before Christmas."

"Left you before Christmas!" cried Walter. "Where did she go? Why did she go?"

Mrs. Beekman shook her head.

"She left us suddenly and without any warning. She did not even say good-by to us."

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Walter. "Her enemies have found her!"

"Her enemies!" said Mrs. Beekman and her son together. "What enemies had she?"

"Ah! I remember," said Walter, his mind working quickly. "She did not tell you her sad story. I must

not take time to repeat it all. She was accused of theft. You must know that she could not be guilty. Tell me when she went away, and all about it."

"It was one afternoon," Howard said. "She had been playing with my little boy in the snow. When he was tired of the play he came into the house, and she went out to a little lake, apparently to skate. When I went out a little later, she was gone, and the footprints showed that she had been joined by some man, and had walked with him to the road, where she got into a sleigh with him. We have not seen her since."

"And you did nothing about it?" cried Walter indignantly.

"Did nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Beekman. "My son jumped into a sleigh and tried to find her. He was not home until after midnight that night. And the next day he was out all day long. We gave the alarm and had the whole country searched. Then when we could not find her we decided that she must have intended to leave us."

"Did the footprints tell you nothing?" Walter asked, a prey to agony, but maintaining his composure with marvelous strength of will.

"They only told us that she must have gone willingly, for there was no evidence of a struggle, and it was plain that she had gone for a long distance by the side of her companion."

Walter placed his hands to his temples as if to subdue the throbbing, that he might think more clearly.

"What can have happened to her?" he murmured. "But I shall discover soon. And if harm has come to her, woe to them who have done it! My darling! my darling!"

An expression of pain and doubt crept into the sweet face of Mrs. Beekman. It was impossible to look at and hear Walter without believing in him.

Howard saw the expression, and feared that his mother would be carried away by her feelings, and betray the truth to his rival.

It was not difficult for him to comprehend that if Walter were to see Viola, all hope for him would be gone.

He saw in Walter just such a man as any woman might love, and who, if loved, would prove irresistible.

"We shall only be too glad to aid you in any way in our power, Mr. Hardman," he said. "If we had doubted that she was in safety, we would never have ceased our efforts to find her. I cannot think why she did not tell us her story. We were too fond of her to have believed such a thing of her."

"The shame of the accusation and of her arrest had stayed her tongue," said Walter absently.

He was settling in his mind the proper course of action. One thing showed itself clearly to him. He

must see his father and Peter Harriem. Then there was Eunice.

"I must return to the city," he said, with decision.

"You will have supper first," Mrs. Beekman said.

"I could not eat with this terrible load on my heart," he answered. "You will forgive me if I go at once."

He took his hat and was going out of the room, when Mrs. Beekman stopped him, saying:

"There is no train for you to take, Mr. Hardman. Eat supper with us, and we will send you down to the first train. Besides, we may, by talking it over, see some way by which we can help you. You may depend upon us."

Howard Beekman viewed his mother with uneasiness. He saw that she had a design in trying to keep Walter.

"I feel as if I must be doing something," Walter answered, his face showing the agony he felt.

"I can understand the feeling," Mrs. Beekman said kindly, as she placed her hand on his arm in a motherly way. "If you love Viola truly, the loss of her would be madness."

"If I love her truly!" Walter said, with vehement passion. "I love her better than life. I would give up all else for her. Love her! Words are too weak. I shall go mad if I do not do something. But, no, I will not **give way**. I must be calm in order that I

may hunt down her persecutors. And that I will do, though my own father be one of them."

"Your father!" cried Mrs. Beekman. "Do you suspect him?"

Howard saw that his mother was rapidly being won by the candor and frank honesty of the young man; he trembled lest she should tell the truth and snatch Viola from his power.

"I have reason to suspect everybody," Walter said. "Viola and I were in love. My father wished me to marry a wealthier girl, and I refused. He persuaded me to consent to a year's probation with the understanding that I was to marry Viola if I still wished at the end of a year. As if one who had ever known her would forget her or love her less."

"And if you find her now, then," Mrs. Beekman said eagerly, "you would wish to make her your wife?"

"I would insist upon it in order that I might secure her from the machinations of her enemies," he answered.

"You must remain to supper," Mrs. Beekman said, in a decided tone. "I tell you we can help you. You might as well remain, for you could not get a train by going. Excuse me and I will order supper at once. Howard, will you come with me and give your orders yourself about the carriage. You will lose nothing by remaining, Mr. Hardman."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"DON'T MARRY VIOLA."

"Howard," said Mrs. Beekman, in a tone of firm conviction, the moment they were alone, "I am sure that young man is the soul of honor. There has been a strange mistake."

"He is a good actor, rather," Howard said sullenly, his brain busy with a determination to discover some way to keep his mother from telling Walter the truth.

"He is not acting, Howard," she responded firmly. "I know truth when I see it, and I purpose to bring those two lovers together. Think of the happiness of Viola in meeting him."

Howard closed his teeth to keep back a fierce imprecation.

"I do not believe in him," he said. "My information cannot be wrong. The truth probably is that he has learned through one of his agents that Viola is here, and has hurried over from Europe to lay claim to her."

"There was truth in his tones, my son, when he told me he loved her, and would make her his wife. Take care that you do not blind yourself with your own passion. Surely you would not do anything remotely dishonorable."

"Is it dishonorable," he demanded, "to save her from a scoundrel? Because I love her, I am more careful than you."

"You have nothing to fear," his mother said gravely. "I tell you he is a highminded, noble young man. My intuition cannot be false."

A sudden thought came to Howard in the midst of his despair.

"You may be right, mother," he said. "Give me time to think it over. You know I am not as quick as you. Let me consider it, and if I have no better plan, I will accede to yours."

"Spoken like my son!" said the good old lady, stroking his cheek.

He pushed her hand away impatiently and strode out of the room, saying:

"I will go order the carriage. I must get into the fresh air to think."

"Poor Howard!" murmured the old lady compassionately. "He loves her so madly that it is hard for him to give her up. But his own noble nature will conquer. When he sees, as I do, that Walter Hardman is worthy of Viola, he will be quick to place her hand in his."

But there was little prospect of such a change in the spirit of Howard Beekman.

He threw on his hat and coat, and hastened out of

the house. But instead of going out to the stable, he sought the front of the house, where he crept along, whistling softly.

Presently his whistle was answered, and he was joined in the shadow of one of the trees by the shivering form of Peter Harriem.

"Ugh! how cold it is!" chattered Peter. "What does he say?"

"What he says is nothing. He has persuaded my mother that he is true and honorable, and unless I can think of some excuse to prevent it, she will tell him that Viola is in the house, and this very evening they will be united. Help me out of the difficulty if your brains are better than mine."

Anger warmed the thin body of the sly wretch. It seemed as if there could be no way to prevent the catastrophe.

"It must not be," he hissed. "He must not marry her."

He spoke with such passion that Howard's first suspicions of him were reawakened.

"How does it concern you so closely?" he asked sharply.

"Concern me!" cried Peter, recollecting himself suddenly. "It does not concern me directly, but it concerns Miss Carroll, and if I do not serve her well, she

has it in her power to ruin me forever. I have good reason to work strenuously for her."

"Now I can comprehend your earnestness," Howard said. "Concoct some scheme, then, that will keep my mother from telling him."

"First tell me everything you can remember," said Peter.

Howard went over the conversation that had taken place in the house, and Peter asked questions until he knew all that had been said, and was able to form an idea of the situation.

He saw just how easy it would be for Walter to learn the whole truth now, with Mrs. Beekman so kindly disposed toward him.

Swiftly into his brain flashed again that picture of Walter struck from behind and falling over the cliff.

"If Walter Hardman were only dead," he whispered.

Howard shuddered and drew away. But Peter followed him closely, and murmured:

"We may put off the revelation by your mother. But a woman once disposed as she is will soon ferret out the truth. And then you will certainly lose your love."

"But he will not die because we wish it," Howard gasped.

"Who knows?" hissed the serpentlike voice of Peter. "Other men have died conveniently."

"Are you talking of murder?" panted Howard, the idea becoming less abhorrent to him as he thought more of it.

"Murder! what an ugly word! It would not be murder if he fell over that cliff on the way to the station."

"No, but how can we expect him to fall there?" asked Howard, in a low voice.

"Suppose you walked with him to the station," said Peter, in his most insinuating tones, "and he should go too near the edge, and trip?"

"I could not make him do it," Howard said.

"But you would not mind having him fall, I suppose?" Peter sneered.

"No. I would be glad if he were dead, but I could not do it. I would forever see his face before me. I wish him dead, but I will not kill him."

In the silence of his heart, Peter cursed his companion. He had hoped to persuade him to do the foul deed which would rid him of a stumblingblock, and would put the curse of Cain on Howard himself.

If it had been a question of facing Walter or any one much less able to defend himself, Peter would never have considered the matter for a moment. As it was, he whispered:

"Will you say to your mother that if she will postpone her revelation until you can have time to see Viola's mother, you will consent?"

"Of course I will say that. But what is your purpose?"

"You shall see. Then will you persuade Walter to walk to the station?"

"Yes. I will say that the horses are sick."

"That will do. Then you must give him a glass of wine before he leaves, and into the wine you must put a few drops of some drug. Have you such a thing in the house?"

Howard shuddered.

"Yes; in the medicine closet are all such things."

"And you will do as I say?" asked Peter, his beady eyes glittering in the dark, as he realized how easily Howard was falling into the trap set for him.

"I will do it," Howard said.

"And then you have only to accompany him as far as the entrance to the part of the road that leads by the cliff. By that time he will begin to feel the effects of the drug, and will—well, never mind the rest."

"But—but——" stammered Howard shudderingly.

"Pshaw!" said Peter. "It seems to me you have no reason to utter a word of doubt. Your part is easy. You would not have me, who has no interest in the

matter, risk my life in an encounter with a man so much superior in strength?"

"But to drug him and—and——"

Peter sneered.

"Well, I have advised you. You may do as you please. I can return to Miss Carroll and assure her that I did all I could. I am sure I have no wish to do the thing."

"She—she wishes it, I suppose," said Howard, trying to palter with himself by trying to believe that the crime would be of her instigation and not his.

Peter emitted his noiseless chuckle.

"Of course she wishes it. She has told me a thousand times that she would rather see him dead than married to Viola. Oh, yes, she as good as advised it herself."

"I don't see how any harm could come to me," Howard murmured.

"Of course not."

"I would make her a better husband than he would," said Howard, with a miserable attempt to justify the horror.

"As for that," sneered the subtle demon at his side, "there can be no guessing. So you will do as you say? Well, I shall be in the neighborhood and see that no harm befalls your guest."

"You will freeze to death," said Howard, his teeth chattering.

"Is there any building around here where i could hide?" asked Peter.

"Here is the key to the tool house. It is out of the way, and is warmer than almost any other of the buildings."

"Bring me out something to eat if you can, will you?"

"Yes, I will bring you out something to eat, and to drink, too," Howard said.

"All right. I'll go in there and wait for you. I suppose you won't change your mind after all?"

"No, I do not care what becomes of him; it will not be my doing."

CHAPTER XXX.

WAS HE WORTHY OF HER?

During Howard's absence from the house, his mother had thought more carefully about Walter, and was thoroughly convinced that he was all he seemed to be.

She felt that it would be wronging Viola not to give her the opportunity to see her lover, from whom she had been separated, and she had quite decided that she should see him when Howard came into the room.

She glanced up at him, and was startled by the deathly pallor of his face.

Immediately she jumped to a conclusion which expressed itself in her pitying thought:

"He loves her so madly that it is like death to him to give her up.

"My poor boy!" she said aloud.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, with a guilty start.

"Do you think," she said sorrowfully, "that I cannot read your thoughts? Ah! I am so sorry."

He cursed his nervousness, which for the moment had made him think she suspected the terrible plot he had entered into.

"What do you read?" he asked evasively.

"I read that you love Viola so much that you cannot bear to give her up."

"I do love her," he said, "with a passion I never dreamed myself capable of. I never before knew what love was. It will kill me to give her up."

"Ah! no," she said soothingly, "it will not kill you to do right."

"Well," he answered, "whether it kills me or not, if he be true to her I must give her up."

"That was my noble boy who spoke then," she murmured.

"But first," he went on doggedly, "I must have a better proof of his good intentions than your mere intuition."

"What proof, Howard?" she asked gently.

"I must have him followed by my detective in New York. He will know how true his words are as to his readiness to quarrel with his father."

"And not let poor Viola see him?" she queried regretfully.

"Not yet," he answered sharply. "You know that if they meet she will believe anything he tells her. Be just to me as well as generous to him."

"Howard, dear," she remonstrated, in a hurt tone, "you know I would never sacrifice you except to the right."

"You mean, mother," he answered irritably, "that you are willing to sacrifice me to your own notion of right. I claim that it is no more than fair that he should be tested. If he is worthy of her I must give way, but if he is not I have a right to ask that I have the chance to win her and make her happy."

"And you wish me to let him depart from the house to-night in order that your detective may follow him in the city?"

"Yes, mother."

"Well, I will accede; but I tell you frankly, Howard, that you are not doing what is right."

"I must take the responsibility of that, mother," he replied, rejoiced that he had won his battle so easily.

"Have you ordered the carriage?" she asked, in a tone that showed how little she liked yielding her point.

"I find that the horses are not fit to go out to-night. He will not mind walking. I will go part of the distance with him in order to show him the way."

"Very well," Mrs. Beekman said, and dismissed that part of the conversation from her mind.

She was determined that, if she could not give Walter the happiness of meeting Viola, she would at least bestow on him such happiness as there might be in conversation about her.

So she returned at once to the room where she had

left Walter, while Howard glided into the lower part of the house and contrived, unobserved, to purloin some food.

This, with a bottle of light wine he took out to the tool house, where Peter was ensconced, and where he found it possible to be comfortable.

All that troubled Peter's mind was that his good clothes would be soiled by the tools he was forced to come in contact with, which might entail the expenditure of some money.

"I'll get that out of Beekman," he said to himself, as he waited.

And so, after Howard had given him the food and wine, and had whispered that his mother had been won over, Peter whined:

"I shall be out of pocket by this trip, and I am a poor man. Miss Carroll never pays me for what I do."

"I will willingly pay you," said Howard. "I have some money with me. How much would satisfy you?"

Peter could never bear to set a price, lest it should be lower than the other would be willing to give.

"I'd rather leave that to you, Mr. Beekman. All I say is that I'm a very poor man, and that nothing will come amiss."

"I think there are one hundred dollars there," How-

ard said quickly, as he thrust a roll of bills into the hand of the other. "Take it!"

He could not help thinking with a shudder that he was paying blood money, and there was a terribly heavy feeling in his heart.

"I think," chuckled Peter, in a tone of horrible purpose, "that one of these hammers would be a good thing for the deed."

"My Heaven! Don't talk in that way!" gasped Howard. "And don't remove any of these tools, or suspicion might fall on me."

The same thought had instantly leaped into the brain of Peter, and he cursed himself for his ill-timed levity.

"If I hadn't said anything," he thought, "I could have taken a hammer and left it where it would be found. Then I would only need to prove an alibi, and I would be all right."

"Of course I won't take any of them," he said. "I am not a fool."

"You will be cold in here, I'm afraid," Howard said.

"Don't worry about me," Peter answered. "What time will you leave the house for the station?"

"At precisely eight o'clock."

"All right. I shall get out of here by quarter of. Don't take too long in getting there, for it is cold waiting out in the night air."

"I will hurry," Howard said, in a low tone.

Mrs. Beekman, meanwhile, had found Walter agitatedly pacing the floor of the sitting room.

"You are distressing yourself about Viola?" she said kindly.

"How can I help it?" he demanded. "If you could only know how I love her, you would understand. I loved her the first moment I ever saw her, and never since has there been any woman in the world for me."

"She is worthy of your great devotion, Mr. Hardman," the old lady said. "I have learned to love her since she has been with me."

"She has written me how good you have been to her," he answered. "I was so sure I would find her here. It all seems so strange. If it were not that I can see truth and honesty in your eyes, Mrs. Beekman, I could find it in my heart to doubt you."

The good old lady flushed crimson.

"Do not doubt me," she said earnestly. "I give you my word that I have in my heart nothing but love for Viola, and good will for you. My dearest wish is that she will be truly mated."

From this the conversation branched to other things, though always filled with thoughts of Viola.

Mrs. Beekman told Walter all the things she could remember of Viola; and described how bravely the latter had rescued little Rupert.

"My son and I are her everlasting debtors for that deed. And even if we did not love her for herself, we would cherish her for that noble act," she said.

How could Walter doubt the absolute good faith of his hosts, when Mrs. Beekman discoursed to him so earnestly of the love she bore Viola.

There had been a vague uneasiness in his mind, hardly amounting to a doubt, before; but by the time Howard returned to the room, Walter was fain to admit that he was with good friends of Viola's.

Howard did his best to maintain this illusion, but while Walter did not again revert to his uneasiness regarding him, he found it much more agreeable to him to converse with Mrs. Beekman.

The supper passed off in a rather constrained way, for there could be little cheerful intercourse under the circumstances.

Walter's mind was full of misery over Viola's mysterious absence, and Howard's was filled with terrible thoughts that he did his best to combat.

But all through the supper the idea presented itself to him that he was talking to a doomed man.

Now and again the picture came into his mind of the stealthy assassin stealing upon his victim, crushing his head in, and then throwing him off the cliff.

Sometimes it seemed as if he could not bear it any

longer, and as if he must go out and warn Peter that he must not do it.

Then the specious argument would present itself that it was none of his business, since it was not a deed of his doing.

"I shall have to ask your pardon for not taking you to the station in the carriage," he said, as supper neared its end.

"It will not matter to me, so that I get there in time," replied Walter. "I beg of you not to let me be late."

"I will take care of that," Howard said; "and to be sure that you do not go wrong I will accompany you part of the way."

When supper was over, and it was time to start, Howard, with a white face which he concealed by turning away, said carelessly:

"It is so cold out I think I will take a drop of brandy before starting. I will bring you a glass."

"I seldom touch anything, thank you," Walter said.

Nevertheless Howard entered the room a few moments later, a tiny glass of brandy in his hand, saying:

"Drink it! it will do you good. You have been under a considerable strain to-day, and will need a little stimulant."

It seemed true enough to Walter, and the quantity seemed so little, that he took the glass and tossed the contents down his throat.

He thought the taste rather queer; but, as he was no judge of brandy, he gave it no further thought.

"Good night!" he said to Mrs. Beekman. "Heaven bless you for your kindness to my darling!"

"Both you and she will always be welcome guests in this house," Mrs. Beekman responded.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LURING HIS VICTIM.

There was hidden in the nature of Peter Harriem the ferocity of the wild beast. If he had had the courage of the brute he would have been a terrible man.

The deed he had elected to do did not trouble him, except as it presented the possibility of danger.

In fact, he almost gloated over the part he had to play. He rehearsed in his evil brain just how he would do it.

And when the time came for him to steal forth from his hiding place, he lighted a match and looked quickly about him.

He would not take one of the tools that would be missed; but he would trust to any stick he might be able to find in the darkness.

The handle of a mattock caught his eye, and he took it in his hand and weighed it to see if it was something he would be likely to find too heavy for him to wield.

"It will do," he murmured. "A blow from that will forever silence him. How I hate him! I always did hate him. I hated him when he was a lad and used to come to the store all decked out in fine clothes, the price of which would have paid for my clothing for ten years."

"Then he came between me and Viola. That is what I am doing this for. Bah! no one will ever find it out. I would not have let that fool Beekman know if it had not been that I wish to have him under my thumb. I shall soon be done with him.

"Now, let me get out of here. I will take the key as a bit of evidence against Beekman. Ah-a! Peter Harriem is too cunning and subtle for these rich swells. Little by little he is climbing his way to the head.

"One of these days he will be one of the richest men in New York, and he will have the prettiest wife in New York, too. She shall wear good clothes to do me honor. I will dress her well, but she must be careful of her dresses, and not wear them out, as the silly creatures do who come to us to buy. That will do for others, but my wife must be careful. It is wrong to waste money, for money is power."

He crept like a snake away from the dismal little tool house, and soon was gliding along the road toward the cliff.

Walter and Howard, meanwhile, were walking along briskly after him. They were some distance behind, but the air was biting, and Walter was impatient, so they moved on rapidly.

"I am sorry you should have had to walk," Howard said, simply to maintain a conversation; for somehow he could not bear to walk in silence.

"It does not matter," Walter said. "I am glad to walk. Something seems the matter with me, anyhow. My head feels heavy. I am glad to walk."

"You have been on such a strain, I suppose," said Howard, with a little catch in his voice. It seemed to him as if he were delivering his companion, bound and helpless, to an assassin.

"Perhaps that is it. I did not feel it until I came out into the open air. No doubt it will soon pass away."

He passed his hand over his head as he spoke, and the next moment his foot struck against something, and he stumbled.

"That was careless," he said. "I did not pick my feet up."

"Do you feel ill?" asked Howard, in a low tone.

"Only this heaviness. Let us walk faster. Perhaps I can throw it off. I suppose I must be feeling the change from the ocean to the steady land. Some persons do, I am told."

"That is it, no doubt," Howard said huskily. "Would you like to turn back?"

If Walter had only taken up the invitation, perhaps the end would have been different. But these things go as they are ordered. He refused.

"Thank you, no. It is nothing. I shall be all right when I get on the cars. I must not lose any time in

hunting for Viola. Ugh! what a miserable twinge that was. Stop a moment!"

He rested for a second, and then moved rapidly on again, fearing he would not otherwise be able to make his way to the station.

He leaned unconsciously on Howard, and the latter dared not push him away, but the contact with the man he was leading to his death made the beads of perspiration roll off his forehead.

"How far is it?" Walter asked.

"About half a mile from here. Can you get on?"

"I must," was the response.

It was not far now to the place where he should abandon Walter to his fate. But Howard hesitated; it seemed to him like committing the murder. And yet, if he did not, was it not likely that Walter would take Viola from him?

But to say to his companion that he would leave him just when he was feeling so wretched. It was horrible!

"I—I was going to leave you just beyond here," he said. "But since you feel as you do, I think—I think that you had better return with me. What do you say?"

"No, I will go on. This is nothing. Do not mind me."

"Will you be able to reach the station?" asked Howard. "Are you sure you can find the way?"

Walter stopped again and pressed his hands to his head.

"It seems as if I were going to sleep," he murmured. "What can it be? Can I really be ill?"

"Perhaps it will pass away better if you move on," Howard suggested, fearing now that Walter would become unconscious before the right place was reached.

"Yes," said Walter, with a violent effort, "I will move on. I—I feel better now."

He did seem to, and went on again with more vigor, though constantly passing his hands over his eyes as if to dispel a cloud that had gathered over them.

"Don't go farther than you should," he said. "I feel better now."

"Really?" demanded Howard. "I am afraid you say that only to be polite."

"No, it is true. Is this the place?"

"I was going to leave you here; but under the circumstances——"

"Good-by!" Walter held out his hand, which Howard took with a sort of horror. "I hope to get news of Viola when I am in the city. Anyhow, I shall find her eventually, and I will make those who have persecuted her rue it. Good-by! thank you for your many kind-

nesses to Viola. She has told me many of the kind things you have done for her."

He shook Howard's hand and let it go.

"Good-by!" Howard said huskily. "I hope you will be successful."

He turned away and walked swiftly back on the road. Walter stood watching, and trying to collect himself more.

"I cannot make it out," he murmured. "I never felt anything like it before. It must be the change from sea to shore. It is passing away."

He drew himself up as if he would drive the sensation of drowsiness away by mere force of will.

"Now I am better. I thought I would drop a few moments ago. I am glad he went back. Somehow I do not like him. I had to thank him for his kindness, but I can't help feeling that his mother is truer. I don't believe he cares much for me, either. But he is so much older. Older men often dislike younger ones just because they are younger."

He stood and talked to himself in this way merely to give himself time to collect his forces.

He knew there was not much time to lose, so he forced himself to start on toward the station.

"I am better all the time. I will be well when I reach the station."

He said this as he strode forward and entered the

gloom of the spot where the trees began, and near which Peter lurked.

His senses were too enthralled by the drug that had been administered to him to enable him to hear the faint rustling of the leaves that followed the stealthy steps of Peter as he nervously changed his position.

But it might have been the unconscious perception of evil that made Walter start and stop when he had gone a few paces into the dark woods.

"How gloomy!" he muttered. "I wonder they do not put lamps at such dark places on country roads."

He started on again.

Peter changed his hold on the mattock handle. His hands were clammy with cold perspiration. He had to wipe his hands dry on his coat.

Walter reeled a little as he walked, for his head was light; but he was much better than he had been. The effects of the drug were working off.

"A queer place to leave a stranger," he muttered, as he strained his eyes in a vain attempt to see some light ahead. "I suppose he forgot about it, or is so used to it that he thinks it nothing."

He had come to the tree behind which Peter lurked. He stopped there to try once more to clear his brain.

Peter hardly breathed. For a moment he fancied Walter had heard some sound to make him suspicious.

He had been able to detect that Walter was not

walking steadily, but he had not been able to tell **what** the extent of his condition was.

He waited with bated breath for Walter to move on two steps farther. He felt a sort of ferocious joy in the thought that, in a second more, perhaps, the deadly club he held in his hands would be crushing into Walter's skull.

Walter took the step. He took one more. Then he heard a light, rushing sound behind him and turned half round.

Then something struck him on the head, and he sunk on one knee. He heard a strangled cry of fierce joy, and the club fell again.

He tried to rise to his feet, holding his hands above his head to shield it.

"Help! help! help!" he cried.

He remembered that Howard Beekman could not be far away, and it seemed possible he might hear and return.

Peter did not utter a word; but the cries of Walter accelerated his movements; and once more the club fell,

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BODY BY THE ROADSIDE.

Perhaps it was the blows he had received, perhaps the drug had already worked off its effects.

None of the blows struck him fairly on the head. His derby hat had protected him somewhat, and Peter's lack of muscle had had something to do with it.

The third blow struck him on the fleshy part of the arm, and for a moment he thought his arm was broken.

The pain did him good, however, for it brought back his scattered wits, and the consciousness came to him that if he would grapple with his assailant he might conquer him.

But he must put him off his guard, if possible. These thoughts flew like lightning through his brain, and ere Peter could strike another blow, Walter had fallen like a log in the road.

A panting cry of rage and delight came from the lips of Peter. He believed he had stunned Walter.

He wanted to see if his victim would move. If he had done so, the club would have been brought down mercilessly on his head again.

But Walter lay like one dead. Peter threw his club far away, and it could be heard crashing down through

the branches of the scrubby growth that lined the face of the cliff.

Peter had thrown it away, because he could not hold it and drag Walter to the edge of the precipice.

He leaped on Walter almost as he threw the club away. His hands closed on Walter's shoulders. Then he felt the hands of Walter leap up out of the darkness and clutch him by the throat.

Walter was at a disadvantage, being prostrate. But Peter was taken by surprise, and before he could think what to do, Walter had thrown him off, and was on his knees.

Then Peter realized that it was a fight for life, or more than life.

Therefore he summoned all his strength, and endeavored to force Walter back again to the earth, with the wild hope of strangling him.

Walter was gripping the throat of his assailant with a hand that seemed to Peter to be of steel.

It flashed through his brain then that this was another of the ways in which Walter had been more favored than he—Walter was stronger.

And Walter had gained his feet now. His head was aching, but his brain was clear, and the ache he did not think of then.

Peter was losing consciousness; he had only sense enough not to betray himself by crying out. He knew

instinctively that it would be useless for him to try to bring Howard back now. Howard would think only of his own safety.

He was like a child now in the hands of Walter, and the gurgling cry of a strangling man rose to his lips.

"Mercy, do not kill me!"

Walter did not recognize the voice and did not heed the appeal. He dared not. He did not know what weapons the wretch might have at his command if once he escaped.

So he pressed the bony throat until the body of Peter sunk limp in his hands. Then he let him drop slowly to the earth, but watched him warily in the light, which would barely enable him to see at all.

Peter did not move, and Walter could tell by his feebly beating heart that there was not much life left in his still body.

"I hope I have not killed him," he murmured, in an awe-stricken tone. "He tried to take my life, but I don't wish his. I suppose he is some miserable thief. What shall I do with him?"

He knelt there for a few moments, trying to think what disposal he should make of him, when it occurred to him that if he did not hasten he would lose his train.

"I will drag him to the roadside," he said to himself. "Perhaps he is a poor wretch who was driven to his

crime. He had but little strength. I will look at his face. If it is that of a thief, I will speak of it at the station. If not, I will let him revive as he can, and will say nothing about it."

He picked the body up and carried it to the roadside, where he laid it down as carefully as the darkness would permit.

Then he fumbled in his pocket and drew out his match safe.

"Once in a while," he muttered, "there is an advantage in being a smoker."

He struck a match as he spoke, and bent over the man. He started in dumb incredulity for a moment, then gasped:

"Peter Harriem! He sought my life. The scoundrel!"

The match went out and dropped from his fingers. The thoughts were coursing each other in his brain.

Why had Peter Harriem ventured on so desperate a deed? Peter Harriem was one of those who had conspired against the peace and happiness of Viola.

No doubt he wished Viola for himself. The wretch, to aspire so high! But how came he there at that hour of the night?

How came he to know that Walter would be passing there? It was not credible that it was a mere accident.

Peter moved, and Walter bent with a fierce impulse to seize him again by the throat and finish the work he had begun.

"He is not fit to live," he muttered. Then he added contemptuously: "But I shall not play the executioner for him. Let him live. He shall answer to me for this."

He drew his handkerchief out of his pocket—it was a large silk one—and with it tied the hands of the prostrate man together behind him.

Then Walter went on with his attempt to unravel the mystery. He struck another match and looked at Peter's face. It was plain that Peter was not near consciousness.

Walter thought of his train. And almost at the same moment he heard the sound of a distant whistle.

"Lost it," he muttered, and resigned himself to studying out the riddle of Peter's action.

"If he tried to get me out of the way he must have some knowledge of where Viola is. He may dislike me, but it is on account of her that he has tried to do this. I wish he would come to his senses. I would make him talk."

He stood still thinking, thinking. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Yes," he cried, "I will do it—I will return with him to the Beekmans'. We can revive him, make him

tell the truth on penalty of being turned over to the law, and then I shall know where Viola is. I suppose this wretch had a spy there at the pier when I landed. He must have followed me, and has been watching me ever since. And he certainly knows where Viola is."

By this time Walter was conscious of the pain in his head from the blows he had received.

But nothing mattered in comparison with the fact that he had thought of a way of solving the mystery about Viola.

He leaned over and picked Peter up. There was no other way but to throw him over his shoulder as he might a sack of grain, and that he did.

It was fortunate now that Peter was so gaunt. If he had fed himself better he would have been heavier for Walter to carry.

He was weight enough as it was, and more than once Walter was forced to stop to take breath.

But there was no thought of doing anything but carrying out his original design. He would have done that at any cost now.

At last the lights of the Beekman mansion shone out, and he felt that he would soon know the truth.

His heart beat high with hope. He believed that he was on the eve of a discovery which should carry joy and happiness to the heart of Viola, as well as to his own.

He paused at the foot of the steps to take breath, then slowly mounted the steps with his burden and rang the bell.

He thought of nothing but that he would soon learn where his darling was, and he did not realize what a picture he made with that uncanny load over his shoulder, and the blood from his wounds staining his face.

What fate was it that brought Howard Beekman to the door?

Was it that he had been starting at every sound since he had reached home, and had been unable to bear the suspense of letting the maid go to the door?

It was he who stood there and stared at Walter as if madness were visiting his brain.

Then a horrified scream broke from his lips, and he reeled back, fainting.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REELING IN HORROR.

Men may cry out at the horror of a sight, but they seldom faint unless a terrible shock is received.

Howard Beekman had received a shock which he would never get over as long as he lived.

He had passed through all the horrors and misery which his imagination could inflict upon him already. He had suffered tortures of conscience; for twist and turn as he would, he could not blind himself to the fact that he was the accomplice of a murderer.

It had required all his self-control to keep his face from betraying to his mother the agony of his soul. He seemed to see blood on everything, and every noise was but the echo of the blows which the assassin was dealing out to the innocent, defenseless victim.

He had gone to the door only because he was unable to bear the suspense of waiting to know from the maid who it was that came there.

Then he had been confronted by the awful spectacle of Walter, with bloodstained face and disordered apparel, bearing on his shoulder the limp body of a man.

In his breathlessness from his exertions, Walter did not speak as he stood there, and to the troubled imagi-

nation of Howard Beekman what he saw was but the wraith of the murdered man.

It was that horror that sent him reeling in a swoon against the wall and made his wild cry sound weirdly through the house.

His trembling limbs did not sink under him, however, and when his mother ran into the hall to ascertain the cause of his frightful cry, he was opening his eyes to stare once again at the picture framed in the doorway.

By this time Walter had recovered his breath and was able to pant:

"Am I so frightful to look at? This man tried to murder me, and I did not know what else to do but to bring him here. It was necessary to take him somewhere."

Mrs. Beekman was speechless with horror, but the words of Walter restored her presence of mind and enabled her to say:

"Your face is covered with blood. Come in and let us do something for you. Howard, help Mr. Hardman!"

Howard forced himself to move forward, hardly able to get over his first shock, yet knowing that his very salvation depended on his doing something to avert discovery.

"Let me take the—the wretch," he said: "I will

put him in a safe place while mother does what she can for you. Are you much hurt?"

"My head is bruised, but that is the worst. Do not let him escape from you. He must explain many things."

"I will put him in the little storeroom upstairs, mother," said Howard, staggering under the burden as he approached the stairs.

"I will send one of the men to assist you," Mrs. Beekman said.

"No, no!" Howard cried hastily. "I think it will be better not to let the servants know of this unless it is necessary. It might interfere with Mr. Hardman's plans in regard to the wretch."

"I do not know that it will make any difference in that respect," Walter said. "Do as you think best."

Mrs. Beekman led him to a room upstairs, and then, with the skill of a woman who has lived long and been useful, she examined the wounds on his head.

"Your scalp is bruised," she said at last, "but I have lotions which will relieve the pain and keep away the ache to-morrow. You should go to bed at once, however."

"Not until I have talked with the miscreant who tried to take my life," Walter said firmly.

"Well," said the old lady dubiously, "I will bathe and bind up your wounds, and will let you talk a little

with the man, but after that you must take a sleeping potion and retire."

"I will do as you say when I have learned what he has to tell me—what he must tell me."

"You know him, then?" Mrs. Beekman said inquiringly.

"Yes, I know him," Walter answered.

"Is he some person who has reason to do you harm?" she asked.

She had a natural curiosity to know what the relations of the two were, yet did not like to ask outright.

"I suppose he thinks that by getting rid of me he will be better able to carry out his foul plot against Viola."

"Viola!" cried the old lady. "What has she to do with this?"

"She is the victim of his wiles," Walter replied. "He knows where she is."

Mrs. Beekman started and stared at Walter.

"Why do you think he knows?" she asked.

She was moving about, waiting on Walter as they talked.

"I will tell you, Mrs. Beekman, for I know that you are true and good. The truth is, that that scoundrel is my father's right-hand man."

"Surely you do not suspect your father of any complicity in this horrible attempt?" she cried.

Walter smiled.

"Certainly not. My father adores me, and would as soon think of taking his own life as of injuring me in the slightest. But I suspect this fellow of working against Viola because my father wishes to prevent the marriage. And as he loves Viola, I do not doubt that he has tried to murder me to get me out of the way, knowing that while I live, Viola will not listen to him."

"Nor would she afterward!" Mrs. Beekman said, with horror.

"He probably does not believe that. Anyhow, he tried to murder me, and I reason from it that he knows where Viola is."

It was on Mrs. Beekman's tongue to reveal the truth about Viola to Walter; but something she could not then understand restrained her.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

She believed she could learn from the circumstances facts that might be hidden from Walter.

"He was waiting for me in a dense, thick wood just beyond where your son left me."

"And you did not hear him approach you?" she asked.

"Not until he was near me, and then I was so stupid from a strange attack of drowsiness that it needed his first blow to restore my senses."

"Drowsiness!" she exclaimed curiously, staring at him. "Did you feel it when you left here?"

"No, it came on after I was outside for a while. At one time I thought I should sink to the road. It probably was due to the change from shipboard to land."

"I wonder that Howard left you," she said, rather to herself than to him. "Did he know you felt so?"

"I felt better when he left me," Walter answered.

"Drowsy!" murmured Mrs. Beekman. "That is not the way one is affected after a voyage. You are dizzy, perhaps, and you feel the motion as of the vessel under your feet. But that is all I ever heard of. You drank no wine at dinner?"

"No, I drank no wine," he answered. "Though I did take a glass of brandy at your son's urgent request just before I went out. Do you remember?"

"I was not in the room at the time," she replied, in a low tone.

Her brain was busy analyzing what Walter had told her. It has already been seen what a keen mind she had for sifting evidences.

She puzzled over this, hardly knowing what she was doing, until a white, distressed expression crept over her face.

"I must speak with Howard," she said to herself. "Of course he will explain how it happened. But it haunts me."

"Did you speak to me?" Walter asked.

She started.

"No, no! I was thinking of the strangeness of the case. So you think this man knows where Viola is. Why do you feel so sure of it?"

"It was through him, in the first place, that the accusation of theft came. I am sure of that—just as sure as if I had known his thoughts. He and Eunice Carroll have done it between them."

"I think there is no doubt of that," Mrs. Beekman said.

"Then Viola disappeared suddenly and mysteriously from your house. It was very unlike her. She would have told you she was going if she had had the chance."

"You think she was abducted?" said the old lady, wondering how far his reasoning would lead him toward the truth.

The thing she was certain of was that whether his reasoning led him or not, he should know that Viola was under the same roof as he that night.

"I do not doubt it. And now I am sure that she was abducted at the instigation of Peter Harriem. I am sure, too, that she is still somewhere in this neighborhood."

"Why do you think that?" she asked.

"Because this wretch was here to prevent me seeing

her. He had followed me here, and feared I would discover the truth, hence the attack on me."

It flashed through Mrs. Beekman's mind that his reasoning, if correct, must imply that the scoundrel knew that Viola was underneath her roof.

And if he knew that, how did he learn it? What must she think? She turned away and pressed her hands to her heart.

It seemed as if she must relieve herself of her trouble by saying at once to Walter that Viola was in the house.

She turned with the words on her tongue, but hesitated when she saw the pallor of his face.

"He is not fit to bear it yet," she murmured. "Besides he is keen, and the same thoughts might flit through his head as have seared their way through mine. I will wait until later. I will give him something now to revive him, so that he will have strength for his interview with his would-be murderer."

She went over to the medicine chest, which contained the cordials and drugs, and lifted the lid.

"Somebody has been at this," she murmured, and began to run her eye over the vials with keen scrutiny.

A deathly pallor suddenly leaped into her face, and she tottered back. A low moan fell from her lips, and she took one vial out of its place.

"Is anything the matter?" Walter asked, with quick apprehension.

"A pain in my heart," she answered, with trembling lips. "It—it sometimes comes. It—it is gone now."

He accepted her explanation and was silent. She examined the vial with close scrutiny.

"This has been used from," she murmured miserably. "A few drops of this in a glass of brandy would cause one to act just as our guest did. Oh, merciful Heaven! can it be that my boy in his mad infatuation for Viola has been guilty of this terrible crime? Heaven help me! What shall I do?"

"I am feeling better now," Walter said. "I think I will go see my prisoner and extort the truth from him."

"You—you are not strong enough," she stammered. "He may not have revived yet."

"As you please," Walter acquiesced, sinking back in his seat. "But if he has recovered I must see him to-night. I could not rest knowing that I am so near discovery."

"You shall see him to-night," she said, and hastened from the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MISERY IN HIS BREAST.

While Mrs. Beekman, with growing horror and misery, was groping her way to the awful truth about her son, the latter had been busied with Peter.

He had felt some signs of life in him when he took him on his shoulder. so he quickly deposited him on a long box in the storeroom, and hastened to his own room for a bottle of brandy.

When he returned, he poured as much as he could of the liquor down the throat of the unconscious man.

The effect was almost immediate. Peter started up as if liquid fire had coursed through his veins.

His first thought was that he was still in the dark woods with the hands of Walter pressing his throat, and he began a strangled scream.

Howard clapped his hand over the other's lips and begged him to desist.

"In the name of Heaven, make no noise," he said. "We have but a few moments to consider a means of escape from the awful plight you have gotten us into. Do you understand me? It is I, Howard Beekman, who is speaking."

"Ugh!" murmured Peter, feeling of his throat with

his long, bony fingers. "I thought it was Walter. What have you done with him? Did you throw him over the cliff?"

"Fool!" groaned Howard, in a tremor of fear. "You are his prisoner. He brought you to this house to keep you a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" gasped Peter. "Let me go. He is not here now. Let me escape! If he gets me into the hands of the law, I am lost, and you are, too," he added, with a savage snarl.

"I cannot let you go," Howard said. "I should be suspected. We must think of some other way. Don't you understand? He is going to interrogate you about Viola. You must bear with it and think of some way of deceiving him."

"Stay here to go to prison?" snarled Peter, trying to push past Howard. "Do you think I am a fool? If I am taken, I swear I will implicate you."

"As well that as to be suspected by letting you escape," Howard said doggedly. "Can't you listen to reason? We have but a few minutes."

Peter steadied his nerves by an effort and reviewed the situation quickly. It looked as if exposure was certain to overtake him, in any event. The only thing to do was to escape with as little punishment as possible.

He was not troubled by scruples about his compan-

ion in crime. He considered only how to get himself out of trouble.

He asked himself what good it would do him to run away then. He saw that he would be an outcast at once, and would be unable to accomplish any of his ends.

To save something, and as much as possible, from the wreck was his thought. A subtle, cunning plan flashed into his brain suddenly.

"I will remain and bear his examination," he said quickly, "but during the night I must escape. Can you arrange that? There must be some way that will not implicate you."

"I will bring you a screw driver," Howard said. "With it you can unscrew the lock, which, you see, is on this side of the door. Then you can get out when you will."

"That is right. I will protect you in my story. He cannot suspect you."

"Yet we have lost our game," Howard said gloomily.

"Why? You are as well off as ever."

"No," answered Howard. "My mother will surely tell him now that Viola is in the house."

"She must not," Peter said. "If he meets Viola, and learns from her what I have done to her, he will kill me. If he meets her before I have escaped, I swear

"I will betray you. You must persuade your mother to keep the secret until the morning."

"I will if I can," Howard murmured, his face ghostly at the thought of being exposed.

"It is not if you can," hissed Peter venomously, "you must."

"I will do my utmost," Howard said.

"Now get me the screw driver," said Peter.

Howard glided swiftly away and returned in a few moments with the tool in question.

"Put it where I can get it, and then tie my hands again," Peter said. "If you tie them I shall have no difficulty in releasing myself. Be sure to prevail on your mother to keep the secret until the morning. Perhaps then I may be able to think of some way by which you can obtain the beautiful Viola after all."

"I will plot no more," Howard said, with a shudder. "Heaven forgive me for what I have already done. I will do no more evil. I think I was mad when I yielded."

Peter smiled inwardly as he thought how useless a crime it would have been for his dupe.

"Just as you please about that," he said. "Somebody is coming. It is your mother, I think. I do not hear his step."

Mrs. Beekman, pale but stern and with burning eyes, entered the room, and looked at the prisoner.

She studied his sneaking, furtive manner, and noticed his whole mean and vicious appearance. Then she turned to Howard and said:

"He is recovered. Shut the door and come with me. I have something to say to you."

It seemed to the guilty man that his mother had discovered everything, and his soul quailed within him, as guilt will quail before honesty and high purpose.

He did as she bade him, exchanging one furtive glance of dismay with Peter, whose eyes conveyed a threat.

"The old lady suspects," was the thought that flashed through the brain of the cunning wretch. "He will have a hard time to persuade her to keep the secret. Well, I will not be outwitted without a struggle. I only hope some one will come with Walter to keep him from violence."

Howard followed his mother into his own room, which she selected, because it was the nearest. She closed the door after he had entered.

He did not speak.

It was plain from her manner that some suspicion was in her mind, but he could not tell how much.

Oh, how he wished in that moment of suspense that he had never fallen to the depths of sin and crime, from which he now saw no way of escaping.

"Howard," said the good old lady, her pride for-

saking her then, "what have you done? Oh, my boy! you who have been my pride, my stay, and comfort all these years! tell me that you are not guilty. Tell me that I am misled by a hideous appearance of complicity that does not in reality exist. Howard! speak!"

He turned away with such misery in his breast as had never been there before. He had sinned and plotted, and the end was that his mother had found him out, and would go down to her grave despising him.

"Mother, I loved her," was all he could say.

"I know—I know," she faltered. "Love will make a man do many things. But this was murder, Howard! Oh, Heaven, that I should live to say it!"

He saw that she either knew or suspected everything.

"It did not succeed," he said miserably.

"But it was in your heart," she moaned.

"I was insane," he said. "Mother, I am as thankful as you that it did not succeed. I should have gone mad had it been done. That man tempted me. I cannot shift the burden of my sin on him, but it is all I have to say."

"He tempted you that he might make use of you. Had he succeeded in his awful purpose, Howard, he would have laughed at you, and would have gone on plotting that he might win Viola himself."

"He!" cried Howard, with a start. "Why, he is but the agent of Eunice Carroll."

"The agent of Eunice Carroll!" repeated the old lady sadly. "Oh, how you have been beguiled! Do you imagine that Eunice Carroll would wish to murder the man she loves and has plotted crime to win?"

"Who is he, then?" Howard cried.

"He is Peter Harriem, who in everything seeks only to get that poor girl in his clutches. He has been using you. Oh, Howard!"

"Peter Harriem!" murmured Howard, realizing at once how he had been duped and played with.

"No other than he," she said. "Now, Howard, help to undo all that you have done. Frankly and humbly give up your hope of winning her from her true lover, and if there be anything to tell that I do not know, let me hear it from your lips."

Howard reflected on his compact with Peter. It was plain enough that to the last Peter was plotting further ruin for him.

"I will tell you everything, mother," he said. "Try to forgive me for what I have done, and on my part I will spend my life in atonement."

"My poor boy!" faltered the mother, ever ready to forgive the child of her bosom.

"I will give up Viola," he said. "I had already resolved on that. My passion is cured by the awful sin

that has been brought home to me. I hope she will be restored to him who loves her and deserves the reward of her love."

"Ah! it atones for much to say these things, Howard. Is there anything I should know?"

"But one thing: Peter Harriem threatened to expose me if I did not persuade you to keep the presence of Viola a secret from Walter Hardman until morning."

"Why did he wish that?" she demanded quickly.

"I do not know."

"I wonder he did not demand to be released," she said.

"I was afraid to let him go lest I should be suspected of complicity. So he agreed to remain on condition that Viola's presence here was kept from Walter until morning."

The old lady pondered that a while, and then said abruptly:

"And he was willing to remain a prisoner and go to jail in the morning if you agreed to that?"

"Oh, no! I was to release him during the night. Or, rather, I have given him a screw driver so that he may let himself out and escape."

Again the old lady's keen brain pondered the matter, and something like the truth came to her.

"I think I understand," she said. "But I will spoil

his plot. And yet, for your sake, he must go free. There is no need that Mr. Hardman should know what you have done."

"I had hoped so," he said humbly.

"No, there is no need," she said.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“HE HAS STOLEN HER.”

“What will you do, mother?” Howard asked.

“I will go to Mr. Hardman and tell him frankly that we had had reason to suspect his intentions toward Viola, and that for that reason we had not told him the truth in regard to her.”

“Perhaps,” said Howard, with a look of shame, “I should tell you something more.”

“Tell me everything that will be of service,” she said.

“When Viola disappeared from here she was not arrested and taken to prison, as she supposed. That was but a pretense. The men were vile wretches, who impersonated officers of the law. The place they took her to was only a private house they had hired for the purpose.”

“And you knew this, Howard?” she said reproachfully.

“I did not know it until I had been to New York and had seen Eunice Carroll, whose scheme it was. She told me of it in order that I might make use of the opportunity to win Viola.”

“And you have been playing a part ever since Viola came back?” she said.

"I have been playing a part," he answered sorrowfully.

"Ah, well!" she murmured, "we will make a happy ending for it to-night. Do not go near that wretch again. I will go to Walter Hardman and tell him the good news."

"You will not implicate me, mother?"

"He shall know nothing about your part in it."

Walter had been waiting impatiently for the return of Mrs. Beekman, and started up when she entered the room.

"I am ready now," he said, "to interview that wretch. I feel quite like myself."

"I wish to say a few words to you first," she said. "Please sit down."

He reseated himself reluctantly, looking impatiently at her for an explanation of her words.

"Is it something important?" he asked.

"Very important," she answered, with a smile, for it rejoiced her to think of reuniting and making happy two such true lovers. "Viola has told me of you."

"Then Viola has, after all, talked of me to you?" he queried.

"She has done little else since a certain event, of which I will now tell you. And I must say again that what I am going to tell you now I would have told you before you left the house this evening, but for a

desire to be overcautious. Viola is dear to me—as dear as a child of my own."

Walter glanced quickly at the old lady, and a sudden color swept up into his cheeks, while his lips parted as if eager to ask a question.

"Question me, then," the old lady said, with a certain glad ring in her voice that made him cry out:

"You know where she is?"

"I do."

"Is she—is she—oh, relieve my suspense! is she in this house?"

Mrs. Beekman moved quickly over to his side, and answered with an outburst of joy:

"She is in this house."

He leaped to his feet, his face radiant with happiness.

"She knows I am here?"

"She knows nothing about it. She is hidden here because we feared for her safety. Even the servants in the house are ignorant of her presence here."

"How good you are! Oh, take me to her! I cannot wait an instant longer. Ah! now I understand why that miscreant tried to murder me. Perhaps he believed I had seen her and was only going away for a little while. But take me to her."

"Would it not be better to prepare her?" the old lady asked doubtfully.

"If you think it best, though they say joy never kills. Go to her, but hasten. I will stand at the door and await your call."

"Yes, yes; I will go."

"Warn her of the bandages on my head. May I not take off the hideous things? My head is so much better."

"Such vanity!" she laughed. "Well, I do not see why you should not. And there! make yourself look a little more presentable while I go. You will be able to hear my call. How happy I am!"

"Heaven bless you!" cried Walter.

She went quickly away, and he turned to the mirror to adjust his collar and tie, and to brush his hair.

All had been in disorder before, but he had not cared. Now it seemed trivial, but it was something to do.

He was in the act of brushing his hair as well as he could, when there fell on his ears a cry of terror and dismay.

He ran to the door and heard it repeated, coupled with hurrying footsteps. He saw Mrs. Beekman hurrying toward him and ran to meet her.

"She is gone!" she said. "She is not here!"

As she spoke she snatched open the door of the store-room and looked in.

"He is gone, too. He has stolen her away!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BOLD DEED.

Keen-witted and always alert for the worst, Peter Harriem had seen in the face of Mrs. Beekman that she suspected much.

A glance at her stern, troubled, yet noble face, had told him that she might be merciful to one repentant, but inexorable to one who persevered in villainy.

"She will get him away, and he will be putty in her hands," he muttered to himself, gnawing his lip as she spoke.

He knew that if Howard Beekman revealed what he knew there would be short shrift for him.

In the consciousness of his danger he did not stop to reason it out, but instantly cast off the handkerchief with which his hands were tied.

"I must think and act quickly," he muttered. "They think they have me cornered. They forget that a cornered rat is always the most dangerous. I have everything to gain, and nothing to lose. But what—what?"

He caught up the screw driver Howard had given him and attacked the door, his mind working as his hands did.

Like lightning his thought flew all around the subject

of his danger, and now and again it would take a leap off to one side.

In one of these leaps aside, so to speak, he recalled that Mrs. Beekman had had something in her hand when she entered, and that she had mechanically laid it on one of the boxes.

He turned his head to see what it was, but could not, and murmured to himself:

"I will look when this is done. The first thing is to make my escape easy. I must not wait for Walter to find me here."

So he worked with astonishing celerity at the lock and presently had it off the door.

"Now I can go. I do not know how much time I have, but I can surely escape. Fools! they shall not trap me this time. What was that she brought in here?"

It seemed strange that his mind should revert to an apparently unimportant matter like that, but his was a mind that neglected nothing.

He sprang over to the box where he had seen her deposit the article in question. It was a small vial.

He snatched it up and held it so that he could read what was on it. As he did so, he uttered an oath of anger.

"This is how she caught him. This is what he used to put in the liquor he gave Walter. Yes, I must

go, indeed. I suppose he can turn State's evidence and go free while I am sent up for years. No, no! I won't take that chance."

He opened the door softly and peered out into the hall. It was deserted and offered him a clear way to escape.

He was stealing out, when a sudden idea struck him and made him pause, while a hideous, malignant scowl distorted his features.

"Why not?" he muttered. "As well for an old sheep as for a young lamb. In this case, however, it is the young lamb. I will try, though I get my death in doing it."

He glided back into the storeroom and snatched up the vial.

Then, with the swiftness of a well-defined purpose, he stole along the hall and up a flight of stairs.

"I am sure this is the way," he muttered.

At the head of the stairs he stopped and listened and peered about him.

"Straight ahead and then to the right," he muttered. "There can be no mistake. Aha, Walter Hardman! it may be my turn, after all. And I have some wires to pull yet."

He went swiftly in the direction he had laid out for himself, and presently had the satisfaction of see-

ing a faint ray of light streaming under a door near him.

He glided like a snake toward the door and listened. He could hear a faint movement within. Softly he tried the door. It was locked on the inside.

He knew that every moment was precious.

How to bring Viola to the door the most quickly and with the least noise.

He glanced at the vial, which he held in his hand, as if it were a precious thing. Then he gave a soft but assured tap.

"Is that you, Mrs. Beekman?" said the soft, sweet voice of Viola; and then, without waiting for a response, she began to unlock the door.

Peter stepped back and waited. Everything depended on the quickness of his movements now.

The door opened and Viola looked wonderingly out. The light she had been in prevented her seeing in the dark where Peter had withdrawn himself.

"I must have been mistaken," she murmured. "I suppose I am so anxious to have her come I imagined she knocked."

She turned as she closed the door, a sigh of weariness escaping her lips.

Then was the moment for Peter to act, and he did so.

He leaped through the door and caught her around the neck, so that nothing but a choking cry escaped her.

He closed the door behind him with a movement of his foot, and with his teeth uncorked the vial he held in his hand.

In another moment he had drawn her head back, and reckless of the danger to her, poured the contents of the vial on her lips.

Fortunately for her life, but little of the drug really entered her mouth and trickled down her throat, or her death would have been instantaneous.

She swallowed enough, however, for it to take effect, and, in spite of all her efforts to retain her consciousness, she sunk lifeless in his arms.

Pale and with panting breath, Peter now opened the door and listened.

He could not hear a sound.

"I must take the chance," said he, under his breath. "I have risked so much and been successful, perhaps fate will see me through. Aha! who would think Peter would do so bold a deed? But I have been driven to it. Now to get her away; I am not strong like Walter, but I have endurance."

He took her up in his arms, and, having disposed her over his shoulder, he crept warily from the room.

It needed no one to tell him the risk he ran if he should be caught.

He was sure if either Walter or Howard were to catch him in the act of abducting Viola his life would hardly be worth a moment's purchase.

But Howard and his mother were engaged in the former's room, and Walter was impatiently waiting for the return of his hostess.

If he had but known that the faint noise he heard in the hall was the miscreant who had attempted his murder, now stealing away with the treasure of his heart.

But Peter passed the door and was down the stairs in so short a space of time that Walter forgot in a moment that he had heard the noise.

Peter closed the front door after him softly, and then, with a freer heart, glided as rapidly as his burden would allow down the path and out into the road.

The weather was sharp and cold, and Viola was illy prepared for it, but she was unconscious, and Peter thought of nothing but safety.

He had not even determined where he would take her. It had flashed into his brain that, rather than surrender her to Walter, he would throw her over the very cliff which he had selected for our hero.

But he was not disposed to lose her, after having taken such pains to find and possess her. So, as he sped along the road, he cudged his brains, and at last uttered a low cry of triumph.

"There is no better place. If I but had a horse!"

As he spoke a short laugh escaped him, and he muttered:

"Why not? Perhaps it will never be found out. I will try it. With a horse and carriage, and that house to hide her in, I may defy pursuit until I have made myself secure. Now, the time is coming when the paper given me by Silas Hardman will protect me. He thought I wanted it only as a security for the share in business. He will learn that Peter Harriem can make more than one use of a document like that."

He exerted himself to move at a greater speed now, and, after having gone along the road to the station for a short distance, turned aside and took a road which would lead him to the village, not more than half a mile distant from that point.

He reached the village, panting and almost ready to drop, but, after a moment's rest in the shadow of a building, he glided toward the hotel sheds, where a number of horses and carriages were standing, waiting for their owners to come out.

He waited for a few moments, to be sure that no one was around to see him, and then stole into the sheds, and as well as he could selected the best horse and buggy.

He placed Viola in the carriage, untied the horse and

backed it out with as little noise as possible, muttering as he did so:

"If I had not been everybody's drudge when I was a boy, I would not have known how to choose the horse. He looks like a good one."

As soon as the animal was out, Peter leaped into the carriage and clucked to the horse, which started away at a quick trot, as if glad of the chance to get home.

And Peter, so far from discouraging the animal's haste, accelerated it by occasional strokes of the whip, so that in a little while the road echoed with the sharp beat of the hoofs on its frozen surface.

Peter had been in the neighborhood so many times that he knew the way well, and needed only an occasional glance at the roadside to enable him to know where he was.

He was merciless to the poor horse, and flogged it when it would have been ready to stop.

But it was a matter of more than life and death to him.

He was battling for triumph over those he hated, and for possession of her for whom he felt a fierce passion.

On and on the poor beast flew, until at last Peter drew it up with a sharp pull and searched the objects along the road for a guide to his whereabouts.

"This is the place," he cried exultantly.

He climbed out, lifted Viola out, and then turned the horse's head in the direction whence it had come, and with a sharp slap on the loins started it on its homeward journey.

"I call that a brilliant performance," he chuckled. "No one will be able to trace me. Aha! Peter Harriem deserves to succeed. Now for the house. I reckon there are nothing but ghosts there to disturb me, and I am not afraid of them. They don't scare me."

He had placed Viola, still unconscious, on the ground. He now took her up and carried her swiftly through a tangled path, at the end of which a dark mass loomed up.

"What a place a haunted house is for hiding a treasure!" he murmured, as he neared it. "I only hope no one else feels as I do about it."

He paused when he reached the house, and looked it over and listened. He did not really fear that anybody was in it, but he was naturally cautious.

"How they will storm when they discover that both birds have flown!" he laughed, as he opened the door of the house and entered. "You have been here before, my dear," he muttered, as he groped along the hall, "and I know there is a nice little cell all fitted up for your use."

He had brought her to the very place from which she had escaped but a short time before.

He took her down the stairs, found his way to the cell, proving that it was not his first visit there, and deposited her on the little bed, her heavy breathing proclaiming that she was still under the influence of the drug.

He lighted a lamp, and when his eyes were accustomed to the light, gazed down at his unconscious victim.

"She is lovely enough to risk a great deal for," he muttered. "Ah, my beautiful Viola! you shall never leave here until you have become my wife. Then I can claim a share in the business of Hardman & Son, and can defy the world."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A DESPAIRING MAN.

For a little while the most intense and incoherent excitement prevailed in the Beekman house.

Howard rushed madly to the wing where Viola had lived in seclusion, and when he discovered that she really was not there tried vainly to conjecture how she had been stolen away.

Walter was thunderstruck, and ran from the store-room to the wing, trying to make out something from the appearance of the two places.

Even Mrs. Beekman was so unstrung by the occurrence that for a while she could do nothing but wring her hands and bemoan the occurrence.

But she was the first to recover herself, and to cry out to her son:

"Howard, the scoundrel cannot have gone far with her for a burden. Run out and see if you cannot find him. Mr. Hardman, go with him. While you are gone I will consider what else can be done."

Her advice was so manifestly the best under the circumstances, that both men darted down the stairs and ran out of the house.

Howard hastened in one direction, and Walter in the other. Both searched the road thoroughly.

Walter took the road to the station as being the only one he was acquainted with, and followed it at a swift pace all the way.

He saw nothing of the fugitive, of course, and was assured at the station that it was impossible that anybody such as he described could have boarded the cars on the last train.

In despair Walter returned as quickly as he could to the house, after ascertaining when the next train would leave for the city.

In the meantime Mrs. Beekman had gone carefully over the house, using her extraordinary faculty of constructive analysis to the best of her ability.

She studied the storeroom with careful scrutiny, and then examined the room occupied by Viola. She jumped to no conclusions, but weighed everything deliberately.

Howard was the first to return. His looks proclaimed his failure. His mother placed her hand kindly on his arm.

"Do not despair, Howard!" she said. "As sure as there is justice in heaven, we shall find her. I know you are being true to yourself, and that is comfort to me."

"How can you look at me so kindly, mother?" he cried vehemently. "How can you speak a word of comfort to me? I curse myself. I see myself now as

if I were another being. How could I have so forgotten my manhood?"

"Hush, Howard! it may be your good fortune to atone by finding her and restoring her to her lover."

"And I will do it, mother, if I can. I swear I will redeem myself, if it can be done, by earnest effort to undo what I am responsible for having happened."

Later Walter, quite fagged out with his rapid walk, entered the house. When he had had a few minutes' rest, Mrs. Beekman said to him:

"Let me show you how it happened. It may be that the knowledge of how it was done will enable you to find some conclusion that is hidden from me."

"How it happened!" Walter repeated. "Can you tell me that?"

"I can nearly tell you. Come!"

She led him to the storeroom and pointed to his handkerchief, which lay on the floor.

"He easily got rid of his bonds," she said. "Then with that screw driver, which must have been left in here, he easily procured an exit. Come upstairs!"

He followed her up and stood at the door of the room, while she pointed to the floor, and said:

"Do you see those stains? I know by the odor that they were caused by the spilling of a stupefying drug. So it is certain that he came up here and summoned

her to the door, surprised her and drugged her. Then he must have carried her away."

"Yes, it is quite clear," Walter said. "So it would seem that he was already provided with the means for carrying her off—the drug, I mean."

Howard glanced at his mother with a look of misery. He was quick enough to see that the drug used was the one which had helped his mother to discover his share in the previous wrongdoing.

"He was plainly provided with a drug," was all she said.

"But the real question is," said Walter, in agony, "where has he taken her to? I shall not rest until I have rescued her. He is capable of the worst acts."

"I have no means of guessing," she replied.

"I know that they did not go on the last train, because I am sure it must have passed before he could have reached the station, and because the man in charge was certain that no such person boarded the train."

"I do not believe he could have gone the other way," Howard said. "I do not think he would have dared. That road leads up into the mountains, and is very rough and rocky."

"And yet," said Mrs. Beekman, "he must have gone somewhere. Have you any suggestion, Mr. Hardman?"

"I had thought of going to the city at once. I could go to my father and tax him with complicity. He may know something that will aid us, though I confess my doubts. Then I would go to Eunice Carroll, and then to Viola's mother. Can you suggest anything else?"

"I would find the detective who was so kind to her, and lay the case before him. He may be able to help you."

"Yes, that is what I will do," Walter said; "though I cannot bear to leave the place where she certainly must be."

"What do you think of the plan, Howard?" asked Mrs. Beekman of her son, who had stood by in silence.

"I think the plan is a good one," he answered. "Some one should go to the city and make inquiries. The only suggestion I would make is that Mr. Hardman go first, and perhaps only to the detective. Miss Carroll would hardly be persuaded to tell him anything if she knew it; and to go to Mrs. Redmond would only alarm her."

"I will accept your suggestion, at least so far as to go first to the detective and take his advice."

"In the meantime," said Howard, "I will continue my search up here in the hope of finding her."

"I am inclined to think he will get her to the city as soon as possible," Mrs. Beekman said.

"Mr. Hardman can work to good advantage there,"

Howard said; "and I can do better than any one else up here. I am going out again at once."

He donned his hat and coat, and was going out, when Walter advanced toward him and held out his hand, saying:

"I can never thank you sufficiently for your good offices, Mr. Beekman."

"Thank me when I have returned Viola to you," Howard said, with his emotion betraying itself on his face.

He went out; and Walter followed not long after, and Mrs. Beekman was left alone.

"Howard will retrieve himself," she murmured. "It is a terrible madness that was upon him. I feel sure by the expression of his face that he has a fixed idea in going out again."

Yes, Howard had a fixed idea, but it was not of very great value so far as he could see. It had merely occurred to him that it would have been possible for P  ter to take the road to the village, and thus escape Walter's pursuit.

He had simply determined to follow down that road until he came to the village and there inquire for such a stranger.

He had not the keen intuition of his mother, or the fiery energy of Walter, but he was animated now by a fierce, dogged determination to run down the man who

had so nearly made a murderer of him, and who at the last had duped him and stolen away Viola.

So he kept right on to the village without seeing anybody to ask any questions of, and without seeing anything to give him a certainty that Peter had come that way.

As he passed the hotel with the intention of continuing on down until he met somebody, he noticed a commotion in the horse sheds.

He stopped, wondering if he should go over and inquire of anybody there, though doubtful of obtaining any information from a hotel crowd on a winter's night.

"I tell ye," he heard a shrill, angry voice say, "I tied him right here. I guess I know what I'm talkin' 'bout. 'Tain't likely I walked down here and then thought I'd rid down. My new buggy, too."

"Better get out an alarm right off," said one of the bystanders.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

The lights of numerous lanterns were flashed on his face, and several voices exclaimed:

"It's Mr. Beekman!"

"Somebody's took Si Walton's horse an' buggy," volunteered some person in the crowd.

"When?" demanded Howard quickly.

"Must 'a' took it within half an hour, anyhow," the

victim said angrily. "I hain't been in thar more'n that time, hev I, Rube?"

"No, ye hain't," was the response.

"Is there no way of determining which way the wagon went?" Howard asked.

"Waal," said one wiseacre, "he must 'a' gone either up or down when he left here, for ther' ain't only them two ways to go."

"Are you not going to do anything about it?" Howard asked sharply. "It seems to me that every man who owns a horse should do something right away."

"True for you, Mr. Beekman!" cried a voice.

"What do you say," Howard went on, "if those of us who are here make a search party? The fellow cannot have gone fár, and, if we go over every road leading out of here, we are sure to hear something of him."

"Oh, let's wait till morning," grumbled one.

"Not at all," said Howard peremptorily. "Who will set out on the search? I, for one, will take my share of the trouble."

A number of others joined them rather for the fun and excitement of the affair than for anything else, and within a short time seven carriages were filled and had set out.

Howard took his place in a buggy with the owner of the stolen horse.

"We ought to find that horse and buggy," he said.

They followed along the road selected for them, and were gone for over an hour before they could persuade themselves to give up the chase until morning.

"Say, Mr. Beekman," said the man suddenly, "I've got an idee."

"Well?"

"I say we go to my house an' see if the blamed critter has gone thar. If she has, you kin bet yer pile thet my wife is mournin' me a dead-and-gone sinner."

They drove to the house and went out to the stable. With its head against the stable door the patient horse stood. Everything was in good order excepting that the reins had dragged and been broken.

"Great Jehosophat?" exclaimed the farmer; "I'll bet a dollar I fergot to tie the critter."

Howard's heart sunk. He had been sure that he was on the trail of the abductor of Viola.

"But look what a lather she's in!" the farmer went on. "It jest don't seem as if she'd got that way comin' home; especially as there ain't nothin' broke to show she'd been tearin' along."

He was holding the lantern up, looking the horse and wagon over critically, when something white in the bottom of the buggy attracted Howard's attention, and he picked it up.

It was a soft, white handkerchief. His heart

throbbed violently. He thrust the handkerchief into his pocket and waited until the man went into the stable to see that the stall was all right. Then he snatched the handkerchief out and took it over to the light on the buggy he had been riding in.

"V. R." were the letters embroidered in one corner. It was the handkerchief of Viola.

She had been taken somewhere in that carriage. Oh, if the horse could only speak!

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Howard suddenly; "what if it should be the same house!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE NEED FOR CAUTION.

"Have you a revolver in the house?" Howard demanded of the man who had come out of the stable.

"No, I haven't," was the response. "My wife is so 't'rnal feared on 'em thet she won't let me hev one in the house. I've told her many's the time——"

Howard cared nothing for what the man had said to his wife on the subject, so he unceremoniously said:

"Well, I fancy I can be of no more use to you, so I will go back and give up the horse to the person who loaned it to us."

"Much obleeged to you, Mr. Beekman," said the man. "I take it right kind on ye to ha' been so interested."

"That is all right. Good night."

Howard was out of the yard while the man was still talking about something remotely connected with horse stealing.

He drove through the village and said that the missing horse had been found; then drove home and had one of the stablemen take the horse back to its owner.

Then he ordered a horse hitched to a carriage for his

immediate use, and went in to his mother, who was waiting up for him.

He told her everything that had happened, and showed her the handkerchief. He asked for her opinion and advice.

"There is no doubt," she said, "that the wretch carried Viola off in that buggy, and then set the horse face homeward and let it go."

"Yes, I am sure of it," Howard answered.

"Then," said his mother, with an air of decision, "it only remains for us to scour the country and find her. Howard you must find her. If you do this—if you can return her to Walter this time—it will be an atonement for some part of the past."

"That is the one thing I am striving for, mother," he answered, in a low tone. "If I can do anything that will relieve me of the terrible feeling of shame and remorse, I shall be only too glad."

"Then set parties out in pursuit. Give a description of her, and offer a large reward to the successful person," Mrs. Beekman said energetically.

"But, mother, I have reason to believe I know the house she has been taken to," he said.

She looked at him for a moment; then her quick brain solved the riddle.

"You think it is the same place she was confined in

before, when she believed herself in prison? That is probable. And you know the house?"

"Yes, I have been there. I would have gone there the instant I thought of it, but I felt that I ought to take a revolver. He is likely to be a desperate man, you know."

"Yes, he will be desperate. Well, get the revolver; and while you are getting it I will order a horse and carriage for you."

"I have done that already," he said.

When he returned downstairs, ready to go, he was surprised to see his mother dressed as if to go out.

"Where are you going, mother?" he asked.

"I am going with you, Howard. If Viola is where you think, it will be better for me to be with you, for she will not feel well after taking that drug. She will be glad to see me."

Howard paused as he was moving toward the door and went back to his mother.

He laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Mother," he said, while his voice trembled with emotion, "you surely do not mistrust me? You do not doubt that I will be true and honorable now?"

"Oh, no, Howard!" she answered quickly. "I know that you are your old self now, and that you will treat Viola as if she were your daughter. I mean only what

"I say! I will go with you for Viola's sake. Do you not believe me?"

He took her in his arms and murmured:

"I do believe you, mother. I have no right to be sensitive; but I am trying so hard to atone."

"And you will atone, Howard," she said, pressing a kiss upon his brow. "Come let us go. Something tells me that we shall have good news for Walter when he comes again."

The servants were informed of their departure and Howard assisted his mother to enter the carriage.

"We may be a little crowded," he said, "but she will not mind that. Oh, if we can only find her!"

"We shall find her, Howard; I know we shall. There can be no doubt that he has taken shelter in the house; it would be almost the only thing he could do. You see, he probably does not know many places in the country. It was shrewd of you to think of it, Howard."

The horse was a good one and carried them over the frozen roads as quickly as it was safe to go.

Howard remembered well where the house was. He recalled with shame how he had played his wicked part that day in the deception of poor Viola.

"There is the house, mother," he said at last, pointing out the indistinct shape to her. "I will leave you

here, so as not to arouse suspicion of the scoundrel if he really be here."

"Be cautious, Howard," she murmured. "Do not risk your own life, nor take his except in self-defense."

Howard set his lips in a hard line, but answered:

"I will be careful, mother."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LOOKING LIKE DEATH.

Words cannot describe the frame of mind in which Walter went to New York. His heart was filled with rage and despair.

He was turning his back on the place where Viola had been stolen from under his very eyes, and yet he knew that he was doing what was best.

He believed that a solution of the mystery that had surrounded her was to be found in New York better than anywhere else, and so he went there, but he went mourning.

Before leaving the Beekmans, he had procured the address of the detective who had befriended Viola, and, late as it was when he reached the city, he went thither at once.

The detective was in bed, but he came downstairs when told that Mr. Walter Hardman wished to see him.

"I owe you an apology, I know," Walter began, "for rousing you at this time of night, but I am in terrible distress, and it seems as if no one could assist me as well as you. I wish to employ you, and will pay you **anything for your services.**"

"Why do you come to me?" asked the detective, as if he had no suspicion of the reason.

"Because I know that you once befriended my betrothed wife, when she was foully accused of a crime of which she was not guilty. It is in relation to Viola Redmond that I come to you now."

"I will do all I can for you," the detective said quickly. "Tell me everything you know about her. I have been unable to do anything about it for a variety of reasons, but I have not failed to think of her and to stand ready at any time to assist her. Besides, I have done something, too."

Walter started in at the beginning and told the detective everything he had learned from every source.

The detective listened to the end, only interrupting to ask a question now and then.

When Walter had finished he said in his quick, decisive way:

"Wait here until I have finished dressing properly, and we will go out together. I see a chance to end this affair."

As soon as he was ready he and Walter left the house. The latter inquired:

"Where are we going now?"

"To search the rooms of Peter Harriem. I have kept a watch on him, and have had a proceeding of this

sort in view. I have no warrant for the search, but a detective must take risks to accomplish his ends."

There was no one on watch at the house where Peter's economy had led him to live, so that the detective had no difficulty in forcing the door leading into his room.

"Rather a burglarious proceeding," he laughed, as the door gave way; "but I think it necessary."

He closed the door after him and lighted a lamp which stood on the table in the room.

Walter was now amazed to see with what swiftness the detective prosecuted his task of searching the place.

He did not even know what the object of the search was.

Presently the detective unearthed a pocketbook which he took to the light and opened, uttering an exclamation as he did so.

"We will find what we are after in here if anywhere," he said to Walter.

"What do you seek?" Walter asked.

"I am looking for the address of some house out of the city, and up in that neighborhood," he answered.

Walter was mystified.

"Why do you look for such a thing?" he asked.

"Because it is plain that there is some place up in that neighborhood which has been used by these scoun-

drels for their pretended prison, for, of course, there was no real arrest, no real prison."

"And you think——" began Walter.

"I think that if there is such a place this fellow will have something to tell him where it is. Another man would carry the fact in his head, but this is one of your sly ones who is always trying to incriminate others. Ten to one he has the address or description in the writing of some one else. There!" he cried triumphantly, as he unfolded a slip of paper and glanced over it. "Just look at that!"

Walter read it eagerly.

It was the description of a house, and he could see that it must be somewhere near where the Beekmans lived.

"Do you happen to know the writing?" the detective asked, his eyes meanwhile running over another piece of paper which he had taken from the pocketbook.

It had not occurred to Walter to think of examining the handwriting. He did so now; at first doubtfully, and at last with horror in his expression.

"It is the writing of Eunice Carroll, I believe."

The detective coolly took it from Walter and put it in his pocket, saying:

"I did not know her handwriting, but I would have sworn it was hers. I do not believe she will give us any trouble, but the paper will be useful in some other way,

maybe. Mr. Harriem did us a service in preserving it, to say nothing of this other document."

"What is it?" demanded Walter.

"It does not matter now" the detective answered. "If necessary I will show it to you. The question now is to get up to the house described in this address. Are you prepared to go?"

"I am," answered Walter. "I cannot rest until I have rescued my darling from the clutches of that scoundrel. He would not hesitate to murder her if he could not bend her to his will; and I know he will never succeed in doing that."

"Well, he isn't likely to attempt it to-night, anyhow," said the detective, who had the faculty of seeming to be perfectly sure of everything he said.

It gave Walter a feeling of confidence in him, and rendered it possible for him to preserve some outward show of composure.

By going into a hotel the detective was enabled to get a time-table and learn about the trains.

"There is a late express, which stops at the station farther on," he said. "It would do just as well for us. We can get a conveyance and reach the house from there as well as from the other station."

"What if she should not be there?" Walter said.

The detective smiled as if there was no manner of doubt in his mind as to that.

"She will be there," he said; and he was as satisfied of that as if he had seen her at that moment.

Yes, she was there, indeed; but, although there were signs of life within her breast, she remained fast locked in the slumber induced by the treacherous drug.

After placing her on the cot and throwing something over her to keep her warm, Peter stood for a while gloating over her beauty.

"Mine or nobody's," he muttered. "Oh, how beautiful!"

He took up the little hand and held it in his great, bony claw for a moment, then bent over her to ascertain how much under the influence of the drug she was.

"I hope I did not give her too much," he murmured. "And yet I would rather see her lying there dead than his bride."

He tried to revive her by gently shaking her, and by slapping her hands as he had heard was done. But the stupor could not be dispelled in that way.

"I will leave her for a while," he said uneasily. "I will go upstairs and make a fire. I know there were the materials there. It won't cost me anything, and I always believe in being comfortable when some one else pays for it."

He chuckled in his hideous way and went upstairs, where he lighted a fire and sat down to enjoy its warmth.

"No one will think of looking for us here," he muttered. "If I could only frighten her into becoming my wife. Then I could return to the city and defy them all. That paper of agreement with the old man would save me from Walter, I fancy. Even Walter would not do anything to mix his father up in the attempt at murder."

He crouched over the fire and rubbed his hands in a way that was uncanny to see.

"Sneaking Peter they call me at the store; and they think I do not know it. As if I have not put down the name of every one who has jeered me behind my back. Some day I shall pay each one for his insolence. Sneaking Peter I may be. I know I am a very sly Peter. Very sly and cunning. Too cunning for most people.

"Look at this, now! They thought they had me safe under lock and key and quite beaten. But I escaped and carried away their treasure. Aha! they reckon without their host when they leave me out of their calculations. I have her in my power, and I will keep her, or—or—— Well, there is no use in settling that yet. At any rate, he shall never fold her in his arms and call her wife.

"I shall see to that. She shall be mine, or no one's. I loved her first, and I deserve her. What if she did love him! She will be better off with me than with

such a spendthrift. And some day I shall be worth more than any of them. I wonder if she is reviving?"

He got up as he spoke and went down to the little room, where she lay in a slumber so quiet and still as to be awesome.

"It looks so horribly like death," he muttered. "I would not like to look at her if I had done it."

He tried to rouse her again, and when he failed in every measure he tried, he would have been alarmed but for the fact that her breathing was strong and regular, if a little heavy.

"If he had given a little more of the stuff to Walter," he snarled, "nothing of this need have happened. He was afraid to do it and Walter recovered from the dose."

He went upstairs again and crouched once more over the fire, listening now and again with startled gaze as the sudden scampering of rats in the empty rooms roused him.

And by and by his eyes closed, and he fell into a fitful, disturbed slumber in which he alternately fought like a cornered brute with his pursuers, and sneered at them.

CHAPTER XL.

IN A TERRIBLE RAGE.

Mrs. Beekman listened to the footfall of her son until it was lost, and then waited for some sound to tell her that he had acted.

Presently he returned, and in a whisper told her that he had contrived to peer through the shutters of one of the rooms, and had seen Peter sitting over the fire.

A glad cry escaped from his mother's lips as she listened, for it seemed to her that Fate had led her son there, that he might purge himself of the sin he had been guilty of.

"Howard," she said, "you must tie the horse and let me get out. I may be able to suggest something that will help you."

"That is why I came back, mother," he said.

So he tied the horse to a tree and saw that it was well covered with the blanket, then, accompanied by his mother, stole up to the house again.

He led her to where Peter could be seen, and she looked for a long time before she drew back, and whispered:

"Howard, he is asleep. Let us steal around to the back door and see if we cannot open it softly. If we could only surprise him it would be a triumph for us."

Howard was naturally doubtful of his abilities as a house breaker, but the plan was too sensible not to be tried.

So they went around to the back of the house, and easily found the door that led into the lower floor:

"I have nothing to force it open with," Howard said dubiously.

Mrs. Beekman tried the knob softly.

"You need nothing," she said, with a low laugh, "it is open."

The door was indeed open, and the two stole quietly in. They closed the door after them, and groped their way along the hall.

Howard did not dare strike a match, lest in doing so he should give the alarm to Peter. Fortunately it was not needed. They found the staircase and crept up.

In after days, Mrs. Beekman laughed at herself in the rôle of burglar, but at the time it was a most exciting adventure.

When the stairs creaked under their weight, they stopped and held their breath while they listened.

But Peter was sound asleep, dreaming of his flight and fight with countless pursuers, who were hemming him in on every side.

Howard led the way, and when he reached the upper hall stopped and caught his mother by the sleeve.

He did not dare utter a word, but he pointed toward

a light which came under the door of the room Peter sat in.

Softly, and with infinite care, they crept to the door; and when there Howard stooped and looked through the keyhole: His mother followed him in this; and then whispered:

"Rush in suddenly, and grasp him. Give me your pistol, already cocked, and I will threaten him with it if he resists."

Howard knew he would have no trouble in mastering Peter if once he had him in his grasp; so he complied with his mother's wish, and gave her the revolver.

Then he softly turned the knob, and when he found the door yield he threw it open, and with a bound had the arms of the sleeping man pinioned behind him.

Peter awoke with a horrible cry. Somehow the capture of him made a part of his dream, and he waked from a nightmare of terror.

He was in full possession of his senses immediately, and after a fierce but ineffectual struggle gave up sullenly, and twisted about until he caught a glimpse of Howard's face.

When he saw who his captor was, he gave vent to a laugh, as if he was no longer concerned.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" he said. "Well, you might as well let me go. I suppose you are not going to make a fool of yourself, are you?"

Mrs. Beekman stepped forward into view before Howard had framed an answer, and Peter's face dropped at sight of her.

"Base wretch!" she exclaimed indignantly, "you may be sure he is not going to make a fool of himself. And you shall pay the penalty of your misdoing."

"My misdoing!" he repeated, recovering himself. "What have I done that your aristocratic son has not been a partner in? Beware what you do, or he shall share my punishment."

"Hold him until I have procured a strap from the buggy, Howard. We will bind him securely this time."

She hastened away, and Peter hissed quickly:

"If you know when you are well off, Howard Beekman, you will let me go before she returns. Your fate is mixed up with mine."

"I would not let you go," Howard answered, "if I knew I would hang within the hour. I have acted the villain far too long. This shall be my atonement."

"You canting fool!" raged Peter.

But he could not move Howard by either prayers or threats, and it was not many minutes ere he was securely bound and lying on the sofa which formed a part of the furniture of the room.

"Now let us find Viola," Mrs. Beekman said.

She took the lamp and searched the rooms on that floor.

Then she went below at the suggestion of Howard, and it was but a few minutes ere they opened the door of Viola's prison and looked upon her as she lay in a stupor on the cot.

Mrs. Beekman looked terrified for a moment, then ran to Viola's side and bent anxiously over her.

"Can she be aroused, mother?" Howard asked.

"Yes, she is safe," she replied. "But lift her and carry her upstairs by the fire. But, hark! what is that noise?"

"It is I, Mrs. Beekman!" cried a voice, which both recognized as belonging to Walter.

"Just in time, then," answered the good lady. "We have secured the scoundrel, and were just about to carry his victim upstairs."

Almost before she had finished, Walter had leaped into the room and had fallen on his knees by the side of his darling, raining kisses on her face.

"Oh, my love—my love! Can she not be aroused?" he demanded.

"Not until we have her at home," Mrs. Beekman answered; "but she is in no danger."

"Let us hasten, then!" Walter cried, as he took the beloved form in his strong arms and bore her up the stairs.

Mrs. Beekman, who carried the lamp, led the way into the room where Peter lay bound, followed by the whole party, the detective, in his silent way, bringing up the rear.

"Caught at last like a rat in a trap, eh?" he said grimly, as his eyes fell on the bound form of the scoundrel.

Peter's eyes were fixed on the picture of Walter with Vjola in his arms. That sight more than anything else seemed to make him feel that he had been thoroughly defeated.

A horrible rage took possession of him, and with a hideous, snakelike wriggle he contrived to squirm to his feet.

"You can't touch me without hurting others!" he screamed. "And she is mine. I loved her first. You shall never—nev—— Ah, what is this?"

He reeled as he spoke and fell backward on the sofa. The detective sprang to him and lifted him to place him on the sofa, so that he would lie at length.

"Dead!" he said, in a shocked tone.

"It must have been his heart," whispered Mrs. Beekman, in an awed tone. "Pray remove the bonds from his limbs."

"All of you go," the detective said. "I will remain here until morning. I am an officer of the law, and he is my prisoner. There is no need for any of you

to be mixed up in this. All of you go. I will attend to everything."

At his mother's suggestion Howard ran out and brought in a carriage rug to wrap Viola in; and then he volunteered to take Walter's carriage back to its stable while Walter took Mrs. Beekman and Viola home.

Walter was more grateful than he could express for all their kindness, but did not hesitate to accept Howard's offer.

It was just before dawn when they reached Mrs. Beekman's house. Viola was carried to the good lady's room.

"We will let her sleep till daylight," Mrs. Beekman said to Walter. "It will be better for her now if the drug will wear itself off naturally."

So Walter gently kissed the lips of his darling, and retired to the room they gave him, and in spite of his anxiety was so worn out that he fell asleep and did not awake until he felt Howard's hand on his shoulder.

He started up and looked at the other, and his first quick word was:

"Viola!"

"She is awake and quite well," Howard answered. "Mother has told her you are here, and she is eager to see you."

With a glad cry Walter sprang out of bed, every trace of fatigue gone. In a marvelously short time

he rejoined Howard, who was waiting in the hall to conduct him to the sitting room, where Viola awaited him.

The young girl rose as she heard his step on the stairs, and was halfway across the room to meet him when he entered.

"My dear love!" he murmured, in an ecstasy of joy, and folded her in his arms.

Mrs. Beekman stole out of the room and closed the door, so that the long-parted lovers might have all the bliss of being alone in the first moments of their transports.

"Never to part again, dear," was one of the things Walter whispered in her ear.

"But your father, Walter?" she queried, fixing her brown eyes on his face.

"My father shall have nothing to say about it, Viola, my love. Never again shall any one decide the question of our love for us. We love and must wed."

She could not combat him when he spoke in that decided way. It was so sweet to have one so strong and masterful to cling to.

"Will you leave everything to me, dear?" he asked.

"Yes, everything," she murmured.

"Then we will be married this afternoon," he said.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SILVER LINING.

When the subject of the marriage was broached to Mrs. Beekman by Walter, she listened to his arguments, and then agreed that it would be justifiable under the circumstances.

"Viola's mother cannot be present, for which I am sorry," she said, "but I will be the best substitute I can. I think that, after all Viola has undergone, it is in every way best that she should become your wife at once."

So everything was arranged for the afternoon, and they were all pleased when Mr. Phil Dexter, the detective, put in an appearance.

He added his commendation to the others when he learned what was going to be done. He explained to Mrs. Beekman that there would be no notoriety attached to any of them in connection with the death of Peter Harriem.

"I took it all on myself," he said, "and the coroner will see that there is no fuss made."

It was a very happy wedding if not a large or fashionable one, and there was a merry wedding supper after it.

After supper the newly wedded pair was to start on a short bridal trip, after which Walter proposed to return to the city.

Phil Dexter listened to his plans with a quiet smile on his sphinxlike face, and when there was an opportunity, drew Walter aside and said to him:

"I suppose you have plenty of money?"

Walter thought at once of his promise to pay the detective his own price, and answered quickly:

"I have a few thousand dollars. I will pay you whenever you let me know how much I owe you."

"Oh," said Phil, "that can wait well enough. What I was wondering was if you had enough to be independent of your father."

"I intend to find something to do. I suppose he will not like this act of mine, and I don't intend to ask any favors of him; he has not acted rightly toward my wife."

"Nonsense!" said the detective. "He is your father and is very fond of you. Will you give me permission to handle the affair in my own way?"

"I won't have anything done that savors of humbling myself or wife for his favor," Walter answered proudly.

"All right," laughed the detective; "I guess there won't be any proposition of that sort."

Walter had not much hope that the detective would

find the handling of his father an easy task, but his heart was light, and he drove from the house when the time came, with a smile on his face and the little hand he loved held tight in his.

Phil Dexter watched the carriage until it was out of sight; then turned to Mrs. Beckman, with a shake of his head.

"Love is a beautiful thing, Mrs. Beckman, but it will be none the less attractive for a little gold to gild it with."

"Do you really hope to win the father's entire forgiveness?" she asked.

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," he replied, with a grim smile.

"I wish you luck for their sakes," she said.

"Thank you; and now, with your permission, I will catch my train and return to the city."

Silas Hardman knew nothing of the wedding of his son to the salesgirl, against whom he had permitted his confidential man to plot, but he was in a very bad humor because that confidential man was not there that morning.

It had been clearly understood between them that Peter was to have his own time in working out his scheme, but he had never taken so much time away before; and it vexed Mr. Hardman.

For one thing, it gave him a great deal of extra

work to do, and perhaps made him realize either that he was growing too old for so much work, or that Peter had always greatly relieved him.

The truth was that Peter had made it his business to shoulder as much as possible of the work that Mr. Hardman would naturally do.

This was the way he had taken to make himself necessary.

"Confound the fellow!" grumbled Mr. Hardman. "I wish I had never entered into the agreement with him. Well, what do you want?"

One of the subordinate clerks had thrust his head doubtfully through the half-opened doorway.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"Has Mr. Harriem come yet?" snarled Mr. Hardman.

"No, sir."

"Who is the gentleman? What does he want?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Show him in, idiot!"

It was a very ungracious way of treating the clerk, but the clerks of Hardman & Son were accustomed to being treated so.

"Well, sir?" inquired Mr. Hardman, as a quiet stranger was ushered in.

"I came to see you, sir," said the stranger, "about a matter in which your son is concerned."

"Your name, please?" said Mr. Hardman.

"Philip Dexter. I am a detective, and was employed to arrest a young lady who was accused of theft, and——"

"Ah! and let her escape," said Mr. Hardman icily.

"Yes; I told her I knew she was innocent and that she had better run away until I should have time to investigate the matter and clear her."

"Indeed, sir! and have you done so?" demanded Mr. Hardman.

"Yes," replied Phil Dexter dryly, "I have done so. The young lady did not steal the ring. It was placed in her pocket as the result of a conspiracy between Miss Eunice Carroll, Mr. Peter Harriem, and one other gentleman, who was foolish enough to write and sign a paper which clearly mixes him up in the matter."

Mr. Hardman rose to his feet, his face white and set.

"How dare you, sir!" he began.

Phil Dexter held up his hand deprecatingly, and drew a piece of paper from his pocket.

"I have the paper right here."

Mr. Hardman sunk back in his chair. For the first time he realized what he had risked.

"I had no part in——"

"My dear sir," interrupted the detective, "I know

all about it. At any rate, I know that you had no part in the attempt on the life of your son."

"Life of my son!" gasped the old man, all the blood leaving his face.

"Yes," said the detective; "Peter Harriem loved the girl who had become your son's betrothed wife, and, finding no other way good enough, tried to murder Walter Hardman."

"Impossible! You are mad! My son is in Europe."

"On the contrary, he is in this country. He learned of the persecution to which Viola Redmond was being subjected, and he came over here at once."

"And now where is he?"

"On his way west, I believe. But Peter Harriem is dead. He died of heart disease."

"Dead!"

"Yes; he died after being foiled in a foul plot to abduct the young lady who is now your son's wife."

"His wife! he has married her?"

"Yes, he has married her; and if you were to seek the world over you could not find a better or more beautiful girl."

"You seem to be interested," said Mr. Hardman.

"Yes," replied the detective, "I am interested. Your son said he would not ask you for any assistance, and I thought that was right. At the same time I have

come to say to you that I think you ought to treat your son as such a son should be treated."

"Thank you," said the old man ironically. "I think I know how and what to do. I wish you a good day."

"Certainly. And this little piece of paper? Shall I put it with another piece I have in Miss Carroll's writing and give them to a lawyer?"

"Do you threaten me by my son's wish?" exclaimed Silas Hardman.

"Your son, as yet, knows nothing of this piece of paper," said the detective.

"Give me the paper," said the old man eagerly. "Give it to me, and I promise you my son shall have all his heart could wish."

Without hesitation the detective handed the paper to the old man and bowed himself out.

When Walter and his bride returned to the city there was a beautifully furnished house waiting for them. And the time came when Silas Hardman wondered at two things: How he had ever conducted his business without Walter, and how he could ever have wished for any other daughter-in-law.

THE END.

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